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**Perspectives on Community-School Relations:
A Study of two schools in Ghana**

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Submitted to the University of Sussex for the degree of Doctor of Education

December 2009

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature

Acknowledgements

Pursuing a doctoral degree in later life can only be driven by vision, ambition and strong determination. Though key, these factors alone may still not guarantee successful completion without the support and encouragement of faculty, family and friends.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAK	Abura Asebu Kwamankese
BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examination
DCE	District Chief Executive
DDE	District Director of Education
DFID	Department for International Development
EDU MGT	Education Management
EFA	Education for All
FCUBE	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
GES	Ghana Education Service
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
JHS	Junior High School
MCE	Municipal Chief Executive
MDE	Municipal Director of Education
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MEO	Municipal Education Office
MEOC	Municipal Education Oversight Committee
MEPT	Municipal Education Planning Team
MMA	Mfantseman Municipal Assembly
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
SGB	School Governing Boards
SMC	School Management Committee
SPIPs	School Performance Improvement Programmes
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
W.COM	Wider Community

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**Ato Essuman****Doctor of Education****Perspectives on community–school relations:
A study of two schools in Ghana****Summary**

In 1987, the Government of Ghana embarked on a process to decentralise education management to districts throughout the country as part of a programme of wider social and democratic governance reforms. A vital element of this reform was the prescription of active community participation in the affairs of schools within their localities. The establishment of school management committees (SMCs) was to create a new school governance landscape based on community participation, as well as devolution of power to the metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies. In this regard, considerable attention has been focused on central government's understanding of how this devolution of authority to communities and schools should work and how communities should assume responsibility for increased participation in schools.

From the inception of this policy over two decades ago, there seems to have been no feedback through research findings or diagnostic policy reviews on how this new role of the community has been received, interpreted and executed in its engagement with schools, particularly in the rural poor and underserved areas. Mindful of this, this study sought to explore the multiple understandings of how community and school relations work, as well as the challenges and pressures which influence community – school relationships.

The study employed the qualitative methods of interview and documentary analysis to collect data on the understanding and experiences of community – school relations from SMCs and PTAs; other members of the community; the school; and education management.

The findings suggest that many of the theoretical and policy expectations about representation and participation in school improvement through the SMC and PTA concept

are only evident in form and not in practice. Furthermore, in poor rural contexts, it is often the comparatively better educated and influential members of the community, including informal groups who become the new brokers of decision-making, and who through their actions close spaces for the genuine representation and participation of others.

In some cases, SMCs seldom work as the de facto representatives of the community, as decisions are made and critical interactions occur outside this formal structure for community representation and engagement in school governance. This affects the visibility of SMCs and undermines their credibility and capacity to play their intended role.

Moreover, the degree of community participation in schools appears to be shaped by the school fulfilling community expectations of schooling and on a 'social contract' based on the principle of reciprocity. These findings support the view that the fate of schools is increasingly tied to and powerfully shaped by key players at the local level, and that this happens through more informal and traditional roles which are more trusted but not necessarily representative of the image presented by policy on community participation in school governance.

The findings also highlight the threat to voluntarism, a key assumption of the policy on community participation and the importance of seeking ways in which schools can play a more active role as change agents in the community, thereby legitimising in the community's eyes their importance in the life of the community.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

For the past few decades, international commentary on the priorities of nation-building has centred on the role of education in acquiring the knowledge required for development and economic competitiveness (Black, 2003). There has also been a resurgent interest in the notions of community participation, social cohesiveness and civic engagement. Many national vision statements present a charter for progress and prosperity based on quality education and community participation. A growing belief that these goals cannot be wholly met through top-down public policy has led to an international interest in new boundary-crossing approaches that bring together the skills, resources and experience of the public sector, private philanthropic organisations and the community (Black, 2003; Latham, 2001; Stewart-Weeks, 1998).

Faguet & Sanchez (2006) observe that education decentralisation, in which policies on community participation are embedded, has become one of the most debated policy issues throughout both the developing and developed worlds. Its theoretical basis rests on the assumption that by moving decision-making and accountability closer to the classroom, education will improve (Litvack et al., 1998; Purkey & Smith, 1985). Shifting decision-making responsibility to local school level means redistributing power among various groups, namely, principals, teachers, parents and the community in general, all of whom are assumed to have a legitimate stake in the content and quality of education. Decentralisation is also premised on the existence of certain prevailing conditions, for example, the availability of resources, genuine opportunities for participation in the decision-making process, and technical and administrative capacity at the local level to support the development of schools.

From this policy expectation, there has emerged the desire to see active community involvement in the affairs of schools within the locality. Development organisations and experts in the field argue that community involvement has the potential to impact positively on educational access, retention and quality in schooling (World Bank, 2001; Litvack et al., 1998).

The World Bank (2001), for example, notes that unless communities are placed at the centre of educational change in Africa, the critical challenges of poverty reduction and educational development are unlikely to be achieved. It goes on to suggest that through community participation, badly needed resources can be channelled effectively to provide schools at the local level with resources that were previously not forthcoming (World Bank, 2001).

Similarly, activists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) see in community participation the potential to empower communities and, in particular, marginalised groups to participate in education decision-making processes (Freire, 1970), leading to an increase in the responsiveness of both local government institutions to their constituencies, and local schools to the communities they serve. In the last two decades, this firm belief in what education decentralisation can achieve in terms of bringing schools and communities closer together to improve access to and quality of education has seen donors and international development partners argue for its inclusion in Education for All (EFA) policies.

1.1 Research Context

In Ghana, the community has traditionally played a key role in the development and provision of education. In fact, many basic schools were originally initiated by communities, who recruited teachers and provided places of learning for their children (McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975). As these community initiated schools developed, they were absorbed into the public school system. The management and control of the schools thus shifted to central government authorities, and communities tended to be less actively involved. This increasingly centralised control and management of the education delivery system over time had the effect of sidelining local community commitment and involvement in the management and delivery of education. Therefore, communities eventually came to regard education provision as the business of the state and not their responsibility.

With the aim of redressing this imbalance, the Government of Ghana (GOG) embarked on two major educational reforms in 1987 and 1996 respectively. The 1987 reform focused on improving access to basic education, the quality of education and its relevance to the

socio-economic development of the country (GOG, 1996). This was to be achieved through effective mobilisation of all stakeholders – including the local communities – for collective and collaborative participation in basic education. The second reform, the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE)¹ programme, was launched in 1996 in response to the weaknesses in the implementation of the earlier reform and concerns about the quality of education. It even went as far as to make it mandatory for communities to participate in school improvement initiatives (GOG, 1996). For example, the construction of new school buildings and the improvement of infrastructure required communities to contribute by cladding the buildings and providing construction labour (World Bank, 2003).

In an effort to lend meaning to community participation in education, bodies were established to ensure that communities had channels through which to articulate their concerns and, ultimately, to improve the quality of education. School management committees (SMCs) and parent teacher associations (PTAs) were established as formal channels through which communities could have a greater say in the affairs of schools, and to ensure a closer relationship between schools and communities and, in the process, to promote a sense of local ownership of schools. Similarly, it was assumed that teachers and other education sector professionals would be more likely to do their jobs better if communities took an active interest in what was happening in the classroom. Community participation in schooling therefore became more urgent than ever. Moreover, the increasing number of schools resulting from the FCUBE programme made the sharing of managerial and sometimes financial responsibility between the government and the local communities in which these schools were located, even more vital.

In effect, a new ‘compact’ was emerging, which regarded local communities as playing an active role in school development and improvement, and which required local people to exercise their power to engage with schools and, in particular, to contribute to school management. This new compact also expected opportunities to be created for communities to support schools by utilising the available skills of their members to help schools improve and develop. Under the 1987 reforms, for example, communities were

¹ Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) – a fee-free intervention by Ghana government to ensure that all children of school going age have access to education.

even expected to provide voluntary teachers with the ability to teach the vocational and technical subjects that had been introduced into the new junior secondary schools that had replaced the old middle schools (GOG, 1996).

1.2 Rationale

Advocates of Community–school relations believe that (a) parent involvement will mobilise and create resources that schools may not be able to generate; (b) parents and teachers are willing partners in home–school links; and (c) parents and families will be able to pool together those local resources that are relevant to the education of their children (Agbo 2007; Schorr, 1997; Epstein, 1995).

First, the assumption that parental involvement will mobilise and create resources that schools may not be able to generate implies that the community possesses a wealth of resources in the form of local traditions and customs that could be useful to pupils. Rogovin (2001) argues that there are vast untapped educational talents within the family and opportunities outside the traditional formal classroom structure that could be useful to schools. “Families are among the greatest resources a teacher will encounter,” she writes, “and no matter where you teach, families are guaranteed resources of human experience” (p40). Rogovin also believes that:

When teachers establish close working relationships with a family, little by little, we get to know the whole child. Families’ observations and insights about children inform our teaching and help us better understand children’s behaviour (p41).

The second assumption, that parents and teachers are willing partners in home–school links, implies that they are eager to co-operate together in education. However, teachers can be resentful of parent involvement (Dornbusch & Glasgow, 1996). Moreover, parent–teacher contact usually “operated in a context of teacher control, with parents asked to assist the teacher” (ibid).

The third assumption, that parents and families will be able to pool local resources that are relevant to the education of their children, implies that teachers and parents share equal power, and parents have the empowerment, information and know-how to influence important decisions. However, Lareau (1996) argues that advocates overemphasise

family–school links because they overlook the power relations that exist between home and school. She believes that there cannot be real home–school partnerships because such collaboration thrives on equality of power, but parents do not have a power base from which to influence important decisions. As she states:

Working class and lower class parents perceive educators as ambassadors for dominant institutions and, in many instances, as a possible threat to their family. This looming and possible threat of educators creates a context within which family-school relations are created (p62).

In Lareau’s view, “parents’ educational skills are often quite weak” (p63) and therefore working class parents are not always an educational resource (ibid).

Given Ghana’s long history of management and control of schools from the Ministry of Education (MOE) Headquarters, these assumptions deserve close study. There is also a paucity of research studies on Ghana that have examined in depth how community stakeholder groups have managed this new responsibility and how they have understood, interpreted and executed their expected role of closer engagement with schools for their improvement.

Moreover, there have been no diagnostic policy reviews on this subject to inform the Ghanaian Ministry of Education how the policy on community participation has been implemented at local level, or whether it should be reformulated to take local realities into account. Instead, considerable attention to community participation has focused on the Ministry’s (MOE) understanding of how the devolution of authority to communities and schools should work and how communities should assume the responsibility of increased participation in education.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Mindful of the considerations raised above, this study aims at exploring the different meanings the policy of decentralisation of education management and community participation has for the various stakeholders, by examining the multiple understandings of how community and school relations work; and the practices, challenges, and environments that influence such relationships.

1.4 Key Assumptions

The study looks critically at assumptions underpinning school–community relations discourse within the literature and in the Ghanaian education reform agenda. Thus, the two key assumptions underpinning this study are:

1. Productive community–school relations rely on a mutual understanding of the value of education; productive channels of engagement that motivate the community to see schools as institutions for promoting the progress of its people; and engaging representatives from both sides (teachers, SMC/PTA members, community opinion leaders, interest groups, etc.) who are committed to both the welfare of the school and the development of the community.
2. Community–school relations that are able to address education quality issues are best achieved when structures and processes (formal and informal) respond to common interests concerning the school and its image within and around the community.

1.5 Significance of the Research

In tackling my Phase One assignment on improving the management of schools through community participation in Ghana (Essuman, 2006), I became aware of the significance of community and parental attitudes towards schooling, and how these attitudes were likely to erode or enhance education quality within the context of decentralised education management.

As the most senior official (permanent secretary of the Ministry of Education) responsible for driving government policy then, it was essential that I understood how such policies were implemented, particularly in rural areas where the needs were greatest. This study provides first-hand feedback on practice in relation to the education decentralisation policy, with the hope of contributing a clearer understanding of community–school relations.

Through this study, I also hope that useful insights into how communities understand their roles and the challenges they face in trying to engage more actively with schools will emerge. Finally, the findings and conclusions of the study will be useful in informing policy

on the governance of schools in which local communities play an active part, and in contributing to the literature on community–school relations and how this shapes or influences education service delivery in developing countries, particularly in rural contexts.

1.6 Research Area

The research focused on two selected basic (i.e. primary and junior secondary) schools and their communities within the Mfantseman Municipality in the Coastal Region of Ghana as the case for the study. The main respondents were drawn from the SMCs, PTAs, the wider communities, the schools and the municipal education directorate. As one case, analysis and discussions are based on themes that emerged, rather than examining them from the points of view of the individual schools/communities. In some instances, however, for the sake of emphasis distinctions have been made to make a point.

The choice of Mfantseman Municipality for this study was informed by the fact that in most rural areas where family income levels are low, school children engage in commercial activities, mostly to support their families and themselves (MOE, 2005). This particularly occurs during the farming, harvesting and fishing seasons, when children support their parents in their various vocations. Considering the potential impact this could have on schooling and parental and community participation in education, it seemed useful to investigate how community and school approached this challenge in their newly defined roles as participants and engagers in community–school relations.

Furthermore, it is estimated that nationally, about 60–65 percent of schools are located in coastal and farming areas (MOE, 2005), whilst the other 35–40 percent are located in peri-urban and urban areas. In drawing my study sample from the former, it was therefore not only assumed that this would be beneficial to Mfantseman Municipality, but that lessons could also be learnt about how community–school relations under such environments can be managed more effectively, with wider implications for education decentralisation in communities with similar socio-economic profiles. In order to facilitate better understanding of the contexts and particular characteristics that may have influenced the results of the study, the next section provides a brief profile of the schools and communities in which they are located.

1.7 Research Location

a) Profile of Mfantseman Municipality

The study was located in Mfantseman Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. This is an area bounded on the west and northwest by Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District, on the east by Gomoa District and on the south by the Gulf of Guinea. It has a population of about 152,000 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000). About 28 percent of the district's population lives in urban settlements, leaving the majority – about 72 percent – living in rural areas. The male population is 46 percent, as opposed to a female population of 54 percent. Agriculture (farming and fishing) is the main economic activity in the municipality, with BigTown, the commercial centre, rivalling the other major commercial centres of Ghana.

Under the new decentralised system, the district administration is known as Mfantseman Municipal Assembly (MMA), with representatives who act as a legislative body. The MMA has 63 members, of which 42 are elected and 21 appointed by the government. A presiding member oversees proceedings in the assembly. The office of the MMA carries out the daily management of the municipality, with the municipal chief executive (MCE) as the political head. The MCE doubles as the chairman of the Municipal Education Oversight Committee (MEOC), which, as the name suggests, has overall responsibility for pre-tertiary education at the decentralised level.

The Municipal Education Office (MEO) is headed by the municipal director of education (MDE) and is supported by four assistant directors, who head the following departments: finance and administration; planning and statistics; human resource management and development; and supervision.

b) Profile of the CBS community

The CBS² basic school was founded by one Mr James with the support of the community that started the school in his living room, opposite the chief's palace. This attracted the attention of the chief of the town, who together with his elders offered the former a plot of land for the construction of classrooms, which were single-handedly built by the

² CBS and Kuku are pseudonyms for the two communities where the studied schools are located.

community through communal labour. The Education Office then appointed a teacher to assist Mr James.

The CBS community is situated within the larger BigTown³ township, and is a very popular and active commercial area in the BigTown Circuit⁴. Despite the commercial nature of activities in the area, the CBS neighbourhood itself is a low-income community, which is also the site of a *Zongo*⁵ settlement. The location of the CBS is in close proximity to a major highway and a very popular and vibrant market. Economic activities are mainly trading (buying and selling), with many of the inhabitants living at subsistence level. This economic environment notwithstanding, the community is a close-knit one and has demonstrated tremendous support for its only public school, to the extent that it occupies first position of all the public schools in Mfantseman Municipality. Until recently, the school structure was dilapidated and, even though there were environmental concerns, this, it seemed, had not affected enrolment or the quality of education. (See photograph 1, p.61)

c) Profile of the Kuku Community

The Kuku is the second largest rural community within this traditional area, with a population of 3,500 people. The DBS Circuit has 17 schools but with only 3 of them in the DBS community itself. Two of the three schools are public schools; the only private school is the Konkron Preparatory School. The DBS primary school has an enrolment of about 600 pupils, which is the largest in the circuit. The basic school was established by the Methodist Church and as such, it is managed by the Methodist Education Unit, whilst the JHS block was built by the municipal assembly and is managed by the Municipal Education Office.

The economic activities of the people are predominantly fishing and farming. At the height of the harvest, in June or July, fish are smoked and transported to BigTown for sale. Due to the nature of these economic activities, migration is commonplace. The majority of adults migrate with their children – many of whom are schoolchildren – to places such as

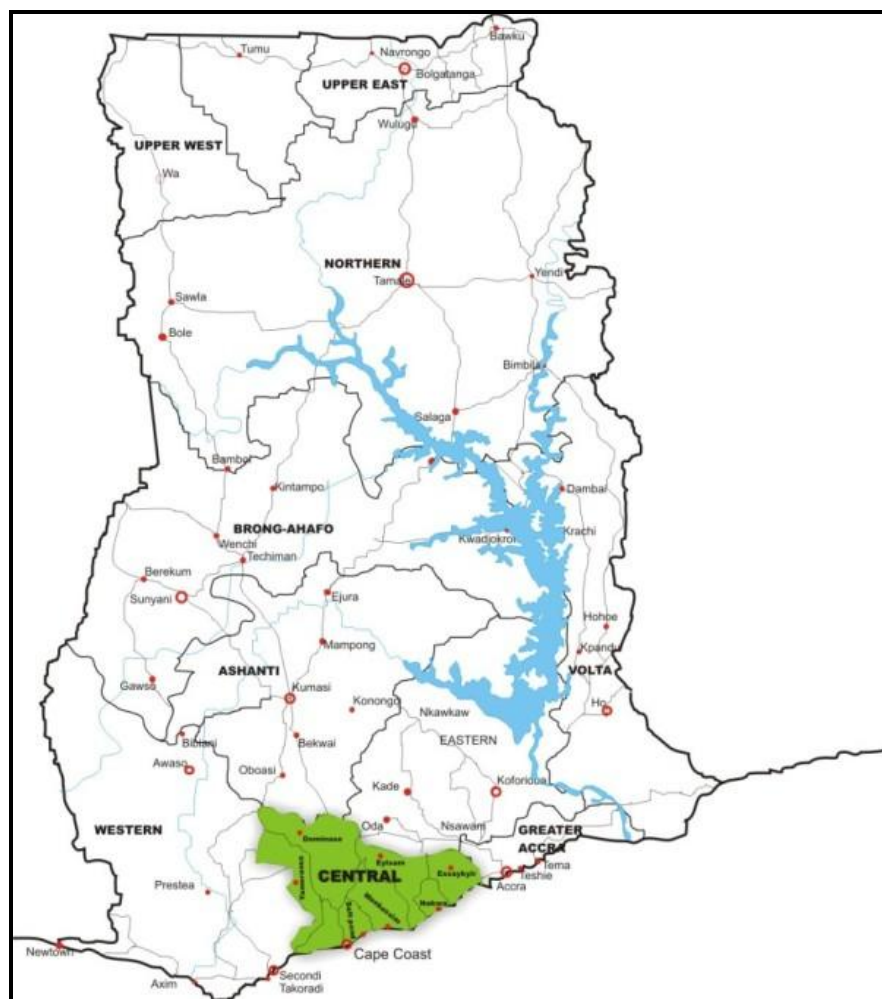
³ BigTown is the pseudonym of the town in which the CBS community is situated.

⁴ Circuits are areas zoned for purposes of administrative oversight. A number of circuits make up a district or a municipality.

⁵ A slum area housing very deprived low-income families, who have extremely basic lifestyles and are ordinarily perceived as having little regard for education.

Half-Assini, Axim, Fasu and other fishing communities in the Western Region, to engage in fishing activities in July and August. However, most of them return to DBS around the first week of December to celebrate the *Ayerye* Festival⁶. One unique feature of the 'schoolchild migrants' is that when their families return to the DBS, the children re-enrol in school. Thus, the children of these migrant fishermen and women enter, exit and re-enter basic school each year. This pattern of repeated enrolment and attendance is not likely to promote real access, as the children are likely to drop out or experience difficulty in progressing smoothly through the various grades (Ghartey, 2007).

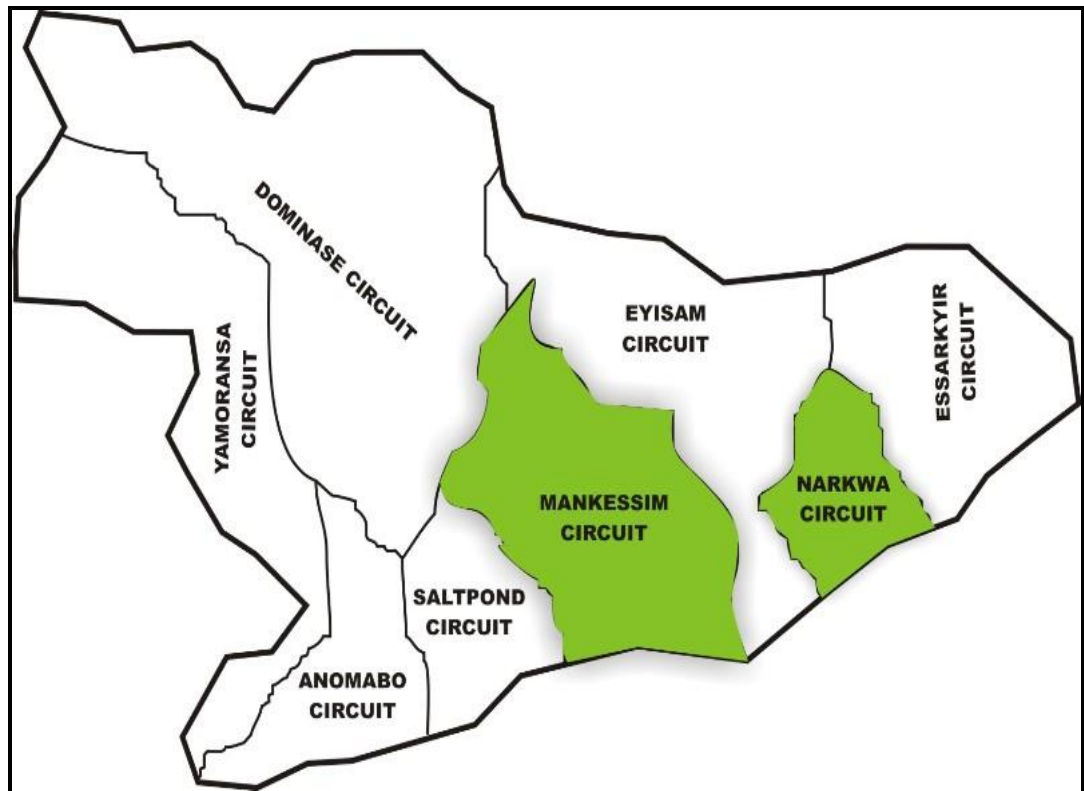
Figure 1: Map of Ghana showing the study region (Central)



Source: UNICEF (2003) School Mapping Report of Mfantseman District

⁶ Ayerye is the annual festival of the DBS community during which many of the citizens at home and abroad come to celebrate

Figure 2: District Map showing the eight circuits of the Mfantseman Municipality and the two research sites (shaded)



Source: UNICEF (2003) School Mapping Report of Mfantseman District

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

Having presented the background, context, rationale, purpose and significance of the study, I will now outline the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two – Decentralisation, Community Participation and School Governance

This Chapter reviews the literature on decentralisation, community participation, school governance, and power in community–school relations. School governance structures and how these have functioned in some countries have been reviewed. The review also highlights the role of accountability and leadership at both the school and community level. The chapter concludes with the conceptual framework of the study.

Chapter Three – Research Methodology

In chapter three, I present an overview of the methodology employed in the study, and highlight the approach I have adopted. Based on the research questions and the aim of the study, a case study approach was employed to provide a deeper understanding of the subject being investigated. Qualitative methods of interview and documentary analysis were employed to collect data.

Chapter Four – Stakeholder Roles in Practice: Multiple Perspectives

In this first analytical chapter, I present stakeholder perspectives on how they have understood their role of participating in the governance of schools and how these have been interpreted and executed. It highlights how such understanding affects the relationship between the school and the community and brings to the fore challenges that come into view as a result of the engagement between the various actors, the school and the community.

Chapter Five – Factors and Conditions Shaping Community Participation in Education

This second analytical chapter highlights communities' expectations from the school in terms of the quality of education that enables pupils to progress to higher levels of the education ladder. These expectations result in what seems to be a 'social contract' based on the reciprocity of roles between communities and schools. The waning spirit of voluntarism, a developing phenomenon emerging partly as a result of the personal cost of participating in the affairs of schools and the challenge foster parenting pose to community/parental roles and their relationship with schools are discussed.

Chapter Six – The Importance of Accountability and Leadership in Enhancing Community – School Relations

This third and final analytical chapter examines two key concepts in the governance of schools – accountability and leadership and how they affect the relationship between the communities and the schools. How these concepts manifested in the two study sites (CBS and Kuku) leading to different outcomes are highlighted.

Chapter Seven – Conclusions and Implications for Policy and Practice

In chapter 7, I draw conclusions on the three analytical chapters (4, 5 & 6) and pull together the key issues that emerged from these chapters and discuss their overall significance in terms of community–school relations. Broad themes discussed are, representation and participation in practice, parental space and participation, capacity, accountability and leadership in the context of community engagement with schools.

Chapter Eight – Reflections

In this final chapter I reflect on the research process in terms of professional insights I gained and make suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two: Decentralisation, Community Participation and School Governance

2.0 Introduction

In exploring community–school relations, it is firstly important to understand the concepts of decentralisation, community participation and school governance and how these enhance or limit education decentralisation and the relationship between the school and the community. It is also significant to note that education decentralisation is often not implemented as an independent sectoral policy, but usually embedded in more generalised national decentralisation reforms. For example, in Argentina, the decentralisation of education services was a component of the national structural reforms undertaken in the early 1990's as a product of wider economic and governance reforms (Gropello, 1999). Issues emerging from this study are therefore not solely confined to discussions within the education environment, but take into consideration the broader framework of the concept of decentralisation.

2.1 Decentralisation

Over the past few decades, decentralisation has become one of the most debated policy issues throughout both the developing and the developed worlds (Faguet & Sanchez, 2006). It is seen as central to national development efforts and is placed squarely in the foreground of policy discourse in many countries. There is, however, little agreement in the empirical literature on the effects of decentralisation on a number of important policy goals. Advocates (e.g. Olowu & Wunsch, 1990; Putnam, 1993; World Bank, 1994) argue that decentralisation can make government more responsive to the governed by “tailoring levels of consumption to the preferences of smaller, more homogeneous groups” (Wallis & Oates, 1988 p5). Critics (e.g. Crook & Sverrisson, 2001; Prud'homme, 1995; Samoff, 1990; Smith, 1985; Tanzi, 1995) dispute this, arguing that local governments are too susceptible to ‘elite capture’; too lacking in technical, human and financial resources; and too corrupt to produce a heterogeneous range of public services that respond efficiently to local demand.

Decentralisation efforts around the world have been undertaken with a multiplicity of stated and unstated motives (Essuman, 2008). Some of them are political (legitimisation of the

state, control of situations of conflict and democratisation, e.g. Hungary, Zimbabwe and Spain); others are fiscal (reduction of the size and cost of central administration; and encouragement of indirect privatisation processes, e.g. Venezuela, Argentina and Mexico). Others still, are for reasons of efficiency and/or with a combination of motives (Gropello, 1999). In some cases, there is a hidden agenda, masked by some of the reasons mentioned. These motives have been translated into different national policies, strategies and approaches to decentralisation in general, and the decentralisation of education management in particular, with the intention of achieving specific outcomes.

Decentralisation is on the rise in both high-income and low-income countries (Kohl, 2003). In the USA, for example, faced with pressures such as low achievement; pervasive teacher and pupil disengagement from teaching and learning; inefficient bureaucracies; collapsing facilities; declining parent involvement; and fiscal cutbacks, many large urban education authorities and school boards have turned to the business management practices of decentralisation of authority and participatory decision-making for solutions (Ibid.).

In Latin America, after a long tradition of centralised government, most countries implemented decentralisation policies (Burki et al., 1999), many of them having been the products of the democratisation fever that gripped the region in the 1980s. Though the process evolved differently in different countries, they showed similar features by way of objectives, methods and results (Gropello, 1999).

In Africa, decentralisation programmes first began in the Francophone countries in reaction to the highly centralised French colonial system. In the Anglophone countries, decentralisation lagged behind by a full two decades, but by the 1980s, about 70 percent of them had adopted decentralisation programmes (Doan, 1995). During the 1990s, decentralisation became part of the 'new development paradigm', which emphasised "decentralization, community development, deregulation, privatization, minimal government, popular participation and flexible forms of foreign aid" (Werlin, 1992 p223). Current World Bank projects and reports promote the idea that decentralisation will not only contribute to more efficient governance, but also hasten economic development and increase local democracy (World Bank, 2000).

It is apparent in all the instances listed above that decentralisation was implemented in response to wider concerns about social and democratic governance and reforms. In Sub-Saharan Africa, it has been triggered largely by conditions that have been attached to donor assistance aimed at improving service delivery (Robinson, 2007).

2.1.1 Defining Decentralisation

Decentralisation as a concept has been variously defined and interpreted (Litvack et al., 1998; Rondinelli, 1981; Sayed, 1997; Welsh & McGinn 1998). Indeed, it can confusingly mean different things, as various writers refer to a range of governmental structures in explaining what it is, depending on the context in which it is advocated. It is sometimes presented as a means of government organisation and method of government management (Litvack et al., 1998). Legal tradition; the institutional structure of government; the tax system; available human and financial resources; and development status have all been known to influence how it is explained or defined. For these reasons, definitions, meanings and interpretations have been influenced by various prerequisites of context, and major trends and developments.

Faguet & Sanchez (2006) define decentralisation as the ‘devolution’ by central (i.e. national) government of specific functions – with all of the administrative, political and economic attributes that these entail – to democratic local (i.e. municipal) governments, which are independent of the centre within a legally delimited geographic and functional domain. They contend that in most cases, intermediate levels of government (i.e. departments) are ignored when decentralising directly to municipalities. However, Litvack et al. (1998) define decentralisation as the ‘transfer’ of the responsibility for planning, decision-making or administrative authority from central government to its branches in the field.

Generally, the literature on decentralisation distinguishes three main forms, which differ mainly in terms of the degree of autonomy in decision-making that the central government gives to its sub-national units (Litvack et al., 1998; Winkler, 1991). However, in practice, it is not usually easy to identify definitive cases, since most correspond to hybrid types that combine elements of at least two of the following forms of decentralisation:

- i) 'Deconcentration' occurs when there is a transfer of responsibilities to lower levels with limited decision-making power within ministries or organs of the central government.
- ii) 'Delegation' is the transfer of the management responsibilities of well-defined functions of public organisations situated outside the normal bureaucratic structure of the central government, and which generally have the semi-autonomous authority to carry out their tasks.
- iii) Finally, 'devolution' means that there is total or complete transfer of management responsibilities to sub-national units of the government or public units in general, which are clearly viewed as separate levels over which central authorities exert little or no direct control. Thus, in principle, these entities have independent authority to carry out their activities. In all three types of decentralisation, the common denominator is 'transfer', and in particular, the degree of transfer; and it is this degree that determines the limits or boundaries of the decentralising authority.

2.1.2 Assumptions about Decentralisation

The concept of decentralisation hinges on two main assumptions. The first is that it helps to strengthen democratic processes by ensuring greater participation in the decision-making processes at the local level (World Bank, 2003). Secondly, it ensures that services are provided more efficiently and effectively at the point of delivery since they are brought closer to the beneficiaries, thus improving accountability (Rondinelli, 1981).

Robinson (2007) points out that these assumptions are made firstly, with the expectation that power and responsibility will be devolved by central government to elected local bodies that are accountable and responsive to their constituents; secondly, that financial resources will be available to support the provision of services at the local level through a combination of central government fiscal transfers and local taxation; and thirdly, that with decentralisation, local administrative capacity will be adequate to deliver the expected increase in demand for local services.

However, these assumptions about decentralisation rest on other assumptions located at the point of service delivery. Thus, if these local conditions are not met, the basic assumptions behind decentralisation are threatened. For example, the influence of the local elite in capturing the benefits of decentralisation from other less powerful members of

the community raises questions about the assumption that the more people share authority, the less likely it is for power and authority to be abused (Murphy, 1993). As Bienen et al. (1990) found, administrative decentralisation in Nepal allowed rich local farmers to capture benefits from locally administered development projects. This tendency for the local elite to take advantage of decentralisation has also created new opportunities for corruption with a regional and local flavour (Werlin 1992; Rondinelli et al., 1989; Wunsch, 2001). For example, there is evidence that local elites in the Ukraine, India and Africa have captured newly privatised state enterprises and evaded local taxes by means of bribery, influence peddling and intimidation (Blair, 2000).

It has also been assumed that decentralisation is a prerequisite for economic development and good governance (Litvack et al., 1998). However, Oyugi (2000) points out that the opposite can also be true, arguing that:

...the rule of law; a fair and efficient system of justice; broad popular involvement in political, social, and economic processes; the capacity to manage development and accountability and transparency in the management of public affairs, are fundamental necessities if decentralisation is to be successful (p6).

In practice, however, the assumptions on which decentralisation is premised require certain supportive conditions, which are absent in many contexts in which decentralisation has been implemented. In effect, although decentralisation policy initiatives are aimed at strengthening local democracy, participation and efficiency in service delivery, they do not fully consider the conditions under which these can be achieved.

Conyers (2006) reviews the evidence on decentralised service delivery outcomes in a variety of African countries and sectors, and finds that despite some isolated examples of success, decentralisation has in the main not made a significant impact on the quality of public services on the continent in general. She argues that the main reason for these poor outcomes stems from the fundamental characteristics of contemporary African states, such as centralisation of power, weak structures of accountability and the lack of countervailing pressure from civil society.

Outcomes of a review of policies, practices and outcomes of decentralization in selected countries (Essuman, 2008) seem to confirm Conyers's observation. For example, in Zimbabwe and Uganda, weak systems and structures led to the manipulation of pupil and teacher numbers, inflation of claims and diversion of funds and other corrupt practices. However, beyond these, there were also challenges of lack of supervision, inadequacy of local government funding, unsynchronised policies, planning and budgeting, centre-driven management of personnel, lack of coordination between local government reforms and sector reforms and the capacity of physical, financial and human resources. All these combined in portraying a picture that seemed to suggest that decentralisation initiatives have largely been unsuccessful in Africa.

2.2 Decentralisation of Education Management

Education decentralisation, just like general decentralisation, has been defined in terms of the shifts in the location and authority of those who govern, and the transfer of authority from one location or level of education organisation to another (Welsh & McGinn, 1998). At the local level, it may involve moving certain responsibilities nearer to the school; strengthening decision-making arenas and weakening others; empowering parents and communities; and adopting the style and substance of modern business and financial management (Arnott & Raab, 2000).

In line with Rondinelli's (1981) types of decentralisation, McLean & King (1999), emphasise that the extent of the transfer of education decentralisation varies from administrative deconcentration, to a broader transfer of authority in the form of delegation or devolution, and may also involve varying degrees of deconcentration, delegation or devolution. As with decentralisation generally, education decentralisation rests on the assumption that by moving decision-making and accountability closer to the classroom, education will improve (Purkey & Smith, 1985).

To gain a sense of the issues that underpin education decentralisation, policies, practices and outcomes of 11 countries that have embarked on education decentralisation were reviewed (see Appendix 1). Some of the key issues identified from this overview of country experiences include lack of policy synchronisation; inadequate education financing; school governance; capacity; political interference; diversion and misapplication of funds; and

equity. Others include delineation of authority and responsibility; corruption; teachers' union resistance; lack of inspection; power relations; inadequate planning; inadequate funding; redefinition of new roles for ministries of education; and foot-dragging by ministry officials for fear of loss of jobs.

On balance, the negative outcomes clearly outweigh the positive ones, which seems to give credence to the perception that decentralisation programmes in many countries have not been successful. It is also clear from the review that in most cases, the focus was on how decentralisation policies were implemented and the resultant outcomes, but less on empowering communities to assume the new role of active participation in school governance.

2.3 Community Participation

2.3.1 Defining Community

Traditionally, sociology defines a community as a group of interacting people living in a common location. However, the definition of the word 'community' has evolved to mean individuals who share characteristics, regardless of their location or degree of interaction, for example the community of interest. Other groups are bound by common ties of kinship, friendship, rivalry, familiarity or jealousy, which guide the social interactions of their lives (Cohen et al., 2001).

Bray (1996) and Christenson & Robinson (1989) identify three types of communities. First, there is the geographical community, which is defined according to its members' place of residence, such as village or district; second, ethnic, racial and religious communities; and third, communities designated by shared family or educational concerns – which may include the PTA and related bodies – are based on adults' shared concerns for the welfare of their children. Bray adds that the size of a community affects the degree of social interaction that people have; local-scale communities have stronger links with each other.

However, Lee & Newby (1983) point out that the fact that people live in close proximity does not necessarily mean that they have much to do with each other, and that there may be little interaction between neighbours. It is the nature of the relationships between

people and the social networks of which they are a part, no matter how geographically distant, that are often seen as one of the more significant aspects of 'community'.

Redding (2001) views the school community as (a) "inclusive of families of students and some elements of the community beyond the school doors," and (b) "operating on the basis of shared values, trust, expectations, and obligations" (p1). Within this context, two types of communities are identified. Firstly, there is the community that is established among the faculty and staff of an organisation, which is also known as a learning community; and secondly, a community that is all-inclusive and one that involves all the members of a school, including parents, teachers, community members and local organisations, which publicly engages all its members (Sergiovanni, 1994).

Although these two definitions are frequently used interchangeably, they have different meanings. The former discusses community in the context of internal school development, in which administrators work with the teachers and all the other members of staff who are part of the school's day-to-day operation, in order to improve pupils' learning in a cohesive manner. The latter is an encompassing development that includes all members who contribute to the children's growth, both within and outside the school system.

For the purposes of this study, however, the concept of community employed is the school community, which I define as the entity holding basic education infrastructure and other educational interests in common and comprising the traditional, educational and political leadership of the area. In effect, this encompasses the local neighbourhood or vicinity of the school; local residents, including community leaders who live in the area and may or may not have children in the school; local groups that are based in the neighbourhood; and non-resident citizens whose actions from time to time have the potential to affect the fortunes of the school.

2.3.2 Defining Participation

Many practitioners involved in community, regional and sustainable development have a more specific definition: the only genuine participation occurs when decision-making power is shared with local people (Chambers, 1994World Bank, 2003). According to Midgley et al. (1986), the notion of popular participation and that of community participation are

interlinked. The former is concerned with broad issues of social development and the creation of opportunities for the involvement of people in the political, economic and social life of a nation. The latter connotes the “direct involvement of ordinary people in local affairs” (p23). Fraser (cited in Tikly & Barrett, 2009 p6) explains that participation requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life, dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others as full partners in social interaction.

Within the larger context of participation is the notion of community participation. Many definitions of community participation draw on United Nations resolutions. One such resolution defines community participation as, “the creation of opportunities to enable all members of a community to actively contribute to and influence the development process and to share equitably in the fruits of development” (United Nations, 1981 p5). ‘Participation’ is usually used as an overarching term that encompasses a broad spectrum of meanings; sometimes it is used as a means to an end and at others as an end in itself. For the purposes of this thesis, however, ‘participation’ is defined as a range of processes through which local communities are involved with schools and play an active role in the governance of schools.

2.3.3 Examining the Case for Community Participation in Education

Community participation in education management is globally considered to be an indispensable step in the effort to provide quality education for all, and a condition for efficient education delivery (DFID, 1997). According to Heath & McLaughlin (1991 p31):

Community involvement is important because the problems of educational achievement and academic success demand resources beyond the scope of the school and most families.

They identified changing family demographics, demands of the professional workplace and the growing diversity among students as some of the reasons that schools and families alone cannot provide sufficient resources to ensure that all children receive the experiences and support needed to succeed in their larger society.

In this regard, community–school partnerships are defined as the connections between school and community, individuals, organisations and businesses that are forged directly or indirectly in order to promote pupils’ social, emotional, physical and intellectual development.

Shelton (2001) asserts that schools cannot successfully prepare young people for life without the strong support and genuine commitment of their local communities. Baku & Agyeman (1997) also argue that community participation in educational provision contributes to improvement in the enrolment and retention of pupils; maintenance of school facilities; the learning environment; and the overall quality and long-term impact of education on the community.

In the view of Watt (2001), Uemura (1999) and Bray (2000), certain socio-economic and cultural factors determine the forms and levels of community participation that in turn affect school performance. However, Adam (2005) and Watt (op. cit.) suggest that these factors notwithstanding, willingness and commitment are equally important in determining the extent to which communities can become involved and that the higher the level of participation, the better the expected educational outcome. Adam (op. cit.) further asserts that factors accounting for the form and level of participation include the performance of children; the value placed on education by the community; the socio-economic status of parents; the level of education of parents and the leadership of the school.

However, the reality is that some communities are better resourced than others because they have the human, physical and financial resources, and the voice needed to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by education decentralisation, while others lack them. Furthermore, communities that are better resourced often receive more extensive and better quality public services than do poor and remote communities (Akyeampong et al., 2007; MOE, 2006).

A major criticism of the participation discourse is that it is based on a naïve understanding of power and the power relations that exist both between central and local actors, and within local groups (Hailey, 2001). A participatory process may merely provide opportunities for the more powerful and serve to maintain exploitation and exclusion

(Hildyard et al., 2001). Views of the relationship between policy-makers and local actors are characterised by a simplistic understanding of power and power relations (Lewis & Naidoo, 2004). They further argue that policy-makers often equate policy intention with policy practice and do not fully grasp what motivates individuals to participate. Individual agency is thus denied, as it is dependent on the construction of social structures and practices. Tikly (2008) argues that participation means the right of different groups – including those less powerful than the dominant group and those who have been historically marginalised – to have a say in education decision-making.

In Burde's view, although participation in school governance is meant to produce multiple benefits to school and society, in the long term it may change perceptions of the role of the state, subsequently undermining the social contract between citizen and state (Burde, 2004). Secondly, such great reliance on community participation in the absence of strong democratic state structures may aggravate rather than assuage social divisions. Finally, newly acquired 'social capital' (networks, norms, trust) and political skills among marginalised members of small communities do not necessarily strengthen civil society (Belloni, 2001).

Examining the purpose of participation in school governance raises questions about the role of the state. Community participation should complement and check the state, not replace it (Burde, 2004). Most importantly, the purpose of participation (to provide a space for community voices and 'claim making') should be clearly linked to the type of participation that is implemented (Botchway, 2000). Botchway concedes that the expected outcome of the policy of community participation is to make communities assume responsibility for their own educational services, thus encouraging them to revise their expectations of the state. However, promoting these concepts can "provide the state with a legitimate opportunity for shirking its responsibilities" by shifting those responsibilities to communities, even though these communities may lack the necessary resources to assume this role (ibid, p136).

Numerous commentators have also noted that in many African countries, bodies that enhance community participation (SMCs PTAs, etc.) have not been mandated with genuine decision-making powers (Therkildsen, 2000; Watt, 2001; Rose, 2003; Ahmed &

Nath, 2005). This point is reinforced by Akyeampong (2004 p8), who observes that education delivery in many low-income countries is often characterised by a top-down approach, whereby decisions are taken at the MOE Headquarters and expected to be implemented in each school irrespective of its particular circumstances and needs.

Again, in a study that explored the kind of impact the Whole School Development Programme was making in some schools in Ghana, head teachers complained that decision-making had not been sufficiently decentralised (Sayed et al., in Akyeampong, 2004 p11). Another assumption that has also been questioned is that there appears to be a unidirectional engagement from community to school, despite the seemingly obvious point that they are interdependent (Dunne et al., 2007). Indeed, this study intends to look at the community–school relationship from both perspectives.

2.3.4 Forms of Community Participation

Various forms of community participation in education have been identified in many studies. Community support for education takes a large number of monetary and non-monetary forms. Monetary support includes fees, levies and fundraising activities. These can be aimed at meeting a shortfall in recurrent public financing, for example, by providing the means to purchase textbooks or supplement teachers' salaries; or they can be used to finance classroom construction. Non-monetary support covers a wide range of activities, from attending school committee and parent teacher association meetings, to providing labour for school construction and maintenance. According to Williams (1997, cited in Watt, 2001 p27), community support for education may be grouped into three principal areas of activity: support for instructional programmes, school management and contributions to school resources.

2.4 School Governance

Community participation in education development programmes is most often manifested in changes in school governance. This usually refers to increased involvement in management and decision-making on the parts of parents, teachers and sometimes other community members. The institutional forms that facilitate community participation can

range from community–school management councils, through parent-teacher associations, to parent advisory councils.

2.4.1 School Governance Structures

In an effort to lend meaning to community participation in education, school governance structures have been established to ensure that communities have channels through which to articulate their voices and ultimately to improve access to and quality of schools. The channels that have been instituted mainly comprise school boards and councils (SBCs), SMCs and PTAs. Even though the emphasis on roles may differ from place to place, these structures are seen as providing local people with the power to act; strengthen school management; build trust between school and community; and provide opportunities for supporting schools, by utilising available skills in the community and ensuring accountability in the school's affairs. Through these actions, it is expected that communities will show more ownership of their schools.

Appendix 2 discusses how some of such structures have operated in selected countries (Hong Kong, Nigeria and Pakistan, as well as in Ghana).

In Appendix 3 the discussion turns to focus on the community in the life of schools and vice versa, with examples from the USA, Malawi, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

2.4.2 Power Relations

Malen (1994) states that schools are mini political systems, nested in multi-level governmental structures, charged with salient public service responsibilities and dependent on diverse constituencies. Confronted with complex, competing demands, chronic resource shortages, unclear technologies, uncertain supports and value-laden issues, schools are faced with difficult, divisive allocative choices (ibid.). As in any polity, actors in schools manage inherent conflict and make distributional decisions by means of processes that pivot on power exercised in various ways and in various arenas. In Malen's view, these processes are amenable to political analyses but have received limited examination, in part because 'politics' is seen as an 'unprofessional' activity to be avoided,

not an inevitable force to be addressed. Simply put, the politics of schools receives more attention than the politics in schools.

By virtue of their position as gatekeepers, principals can filter demands and affect deliberations in potent ways. They have leverage over the composition of councils, an advantage that enables them to invite traditional supporters to be members, co-opt vocal critics and condition parents into a supportive, at times submissive role (Golding, 1993). As the ones in charge of and accountable for their schools, principals have resources (e.g. stature, information, prerogatives) that can be used to control the agenda and ensure that the running of the school is safely in their hands (Malen, 1994).

The principal's ability to control decision-making processes and outcomes is augmented by teachers' willingness to align themselves with the former, to keep major issues in the purview of the professionals (Berman, Weiler Associates, 1984). Additionally, head teachers also take advantage of their authority to divert contentious topics to private arenas, such as setting up 'subcommittees' of head teachers and teachers to deal with divisive matters (Malen & Ogawa 1988). This pattern is also the result of parents' reluctance to challenge the dynamics. Thus, for a mix of reasons, such as deference to the expertise of professionals; limited information about actual school operations; 'serve and support' orientations; and appreciation of being 'invited' to join the council, parents tend to be reticent partisans (Chapman & Boyd, 1986).

This all suggests that community–school engagement is truly a dimension of community power relations, and makes it important for the interaction between school and community to be understood from this perspective. This knowledge makes it essential for school administrators to strive to familiarise themselves with the sources of power and the power groupings that exist in the communities in which their schools are located. It is therefore necessary for such local dynamics to be understood in order to help guide the school in managing its dealings with the people who serve on committees such as the SMC and the PTA and, indeed, those in the wider community, to enable it to work towards the convergence of interests rather than the contrary.

2.4.3 Accountability and School Governance

Decentralisation of education management assumes that the involvement of parents and community in decision-making will enhance accountability (Purkey & Smith, 1985; Robinson, 2007). Beckmann (2000) states that the demands of both democracy and efficiency require some form of accountability in schools. In Maile's (2002 p331) view, accountability should be regarded as one of the essential elements of school governance, as it helps to strengthen the position of school managers: "It is the obligation of the school to report to its community about the quality of services it offers and the community to hold the school accountable."

Accountability provides legitimacy to public officials and organisations such as schools (Bovens et al., 2008) and ensures that the exercise of public authority is not taken for granted. Confidence in institutions can be fragile and a large number of them experience both substantial fluctuation in public trust and the gradual long-term erosion of commitment and unqualified support (Pharr & Putnam, 2000; Dogan, 2005). Public accountability – in the sense of transparency, responsiveness and answerability – must therefore aim to assure public confidence in governance and bridge the gap between community and school (Aucoin & Heintzman, 2000).

Furthermore, accountability can also serve as a tool to induce reflection and learning, as a feedback mechanism that can help to ensure that schools and education officials consistently meet agreed targets. Accountability can induce both the school and SMC to develop and thus improve their performance, because it provides external feedback on the intended and unintended effects of policy implementation (Aucoin & Heintzman, 2000; Behn, 2001).

The possibility of sanctions or protests from the community and other stakeholders in the event of errors and shortcomings motivates the school or officials to search for more innovative ways of organising their work. Moreover, the public nature of the accountability process teaches others in similar positions what is expected of them, what works and what does not. Public performance reviews, for example, can induce many more officials than those under scrutiny to rethink and adjust their policies. Accountability mechanisms induce

openness and reflexivity in administrative systems that might otherwise be primarily inward-looking (Bovens et al., 2008).

2.4.4 Leadership and School Governance

Lane & Dorfman (1997); Jolly & Deloney (1996) assert that community-school relations do not come about by chance, but are the product of careful planning and development. Much has been written on leadership over the past thirty years or so, but it is beyond the scope of this literature review to undertake a detailed analysis of the various theories and models that have enjoyed popularity at different times and within different contexts. Instead, I overview four areas of particular relevance to the current study: changing paradigms of leadership; the leadership process and effective community-school partnerships; and the role of individuals in facilitating the leadership process for community-school partnerships.

Barker (1997) summarised the three main schools of thought regarding leadership, namely leadership as: ability, a relationship or a process. The traditional leadership paradigm viewed leadership as an *ability* (or set of traits or behaviours) possessed by certain individuals or 'leaders'. Barker (1997) considered this view of leadership to be based on confusion between management and leadership, and suggested that 'when we think of the ability of leaders, we are probably thinking of the ability of leaders to manage' (p6). He distinguished between management which creates stability and leadership which creates change, and argued that management can be viewed as a skill or set of behaviours, whereas leadership which deals with uncertainty and the unknown cannot be viewed in this way. However, he recognised that people in formal leadership roles (for example, school Principals) engage in both management and leadership activities.

Leadership as a *relationship* emphasises leadership as a result of interaction between people. Rost (1993 p99) conceived of leadership in this way, as 'an influence relationship among leaders and collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes. An important element of leadership, according to this view, is that both leaders and collaborators bring resources to the relationship that are useful for accomplishing their intended changes (Rost, 1991). The relationship is multi-directional and not coercive. However, what separates leaders from collaborators is the power resources possessed by leaders which allow them to exercise greater influence (Rost, 1991).

According to Barker (1997), the third view of leadership is that of a dynamic and collaborative *process* in which leadership roles are not clearly defined. This view represents a move away from the traditional leadership paradigm, in that it shifts the focus of leadership away from the role and influence of a designated 'leader', and towards a concept of leadership as a group process. Through the leadership process, which involves influencing, compromising and sacrificing, a new shared vision for the future is gradually developed to reflect the collective needs of the group (Barker, 1997). Leadership is therefore created as individuals and groups interact and collaborate. The concept of leadership as a process represents a more recent leadership paradigm which challenges thinking about traditional leadership practices and training.

Many educational and rural community development policy directions encourage schools and communities to work together for their mutual benefit. For both schools and communities, this means crossing traditional boundaries and making connections that 'go beyond traditional roles and community norms' (Lane & Dorfman, 1997, p2). It would seem that the development of effective and sustainable school–community partnerships is most likely to be facilitated by a collective leadership process (Barker, 1997), in which school and community together develop and enact a shared vision. However, the effectiveness of this process would seem to depend on the extent to which collaborative practices are already in place within the school and community. The following sections overview leadership for schools and communities.

School Leadership

The need for educators to foster collective leadership processes in order to bring about and support sustainable change within their schools, is supported by research into effective educational leadership. For example, Sergiovanni (1994) argued that sustainable school improvement efforts revolve around the concept of the school as a community rather than an organisation, and noted that an outcome of community building in schools is strengthening of other community institutions such as the family and the neighbourhood (community). He proposed that schools should become a community of leaders, in which leadership is defined as 'the exercise of wit and will, principle and passion, time and talent, and purpose and power in a way that allows the group to increase the likelihood that shared goals will be accomplished' (p170).

In support of this view, Lambert (1998) argued that educational leadership is a reciprocal learning process amongst people who share goals and visions. Inherent in this process is active participation by teachers and parents, which is likely to come about through the redistribution of power and authority within the school, and the development of a culture in which everyone has the right and potential to be a leader.

The notion of reciprocal leadership is also supported in the community development literature (Langone & Rohs, 1995). The view of leadership as a collective, reciprocal process builds on Burns' (1978) transforming leadership, which he described as 'the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers' (p425). Central to this definition is that those involved in the process must either have mutual or similar goals, in other words, commitment to change.

More recent educational leadership research (Bass, 2000; Leithwood, 1994) indicated that Burns' (1978) concept of commitment is central to what is now generally referred to as transformational leadership. Kilpatrick et al. (2002), argues that a transformational model of leadership facilitates effective school reform. As Leithwood (1994) noted, transformational leadership focuses on both core practices within the school and influencing school culture, distributing leadership.

Silins and Mulford (cited in Kilpatrick et al., 2002) established a positive relationship between transformational leadership practices within schools and their level of organisational learning. These characteristics include a trusting and collaborative climate, willingness to take initiatives and risks, a shared and monitored school mission, and ongoing, relevant and challenging professional development.

2.5 Theoretical Perspectives and Conceptual Framework

A literature search on the concept of community participation in schooling prompted my exploration of the theories and models that I could apply in this study. My conceptual framework draws on the theoretical perspectives of Epstein's (1995) overlapping spheres of influence that stress on the role of the family, school and community in their children's

education and the Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's (1997) theory of parental involvement in education.

2.5.1 Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Epstein's (1995) theory of overlapping spheres of influence identifies schools, families and communities as the major institutions that socialise and educate children. A central principle of this theory is that certain goals, such as academic success, are of interest to each of these institutions and are best achieved through co-operative action and support (Epstein et al., 2002). I draw on this hypothesis to develop some aspects of my conceptual framework, as illustrated in Figure 3, p.34.

The model locates the pupil at the centre of this construct. To give effect to her overlapping spheres of influence, Epstein et al., (2002), suggested six types of family involvement. These are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and community collaboration.

2.5.2 Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Theory of Parental Involvement in Education

In their research into how and why parents become involved in their children's learning, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) developed a theoretical model to explain parental involvement in children's education. The Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) model suggests that decisions and choices that parents make are based on several constructs, including firstly, their personal construction of the parenting role, i.e. what they believe they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education. Secondly, there is parents' personal sense of efficacy in helping their children succeed in school, i.e. whether they believe in and are confident about their ability to be helpful to their children. Thirdly, decisions parents make about their involvement are derived from general invitations, demands and opportunities for family co-operation.

According to Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (ibid), once parents decide to become involved, their choices about how they are involved are shaped by three additional constructs: their perceptions of their own skills, interests and abilities; their experiences of other demands

on their time and energy; and their experiences of specific suggestions and invitations for involvement from children, teachers, and schools.

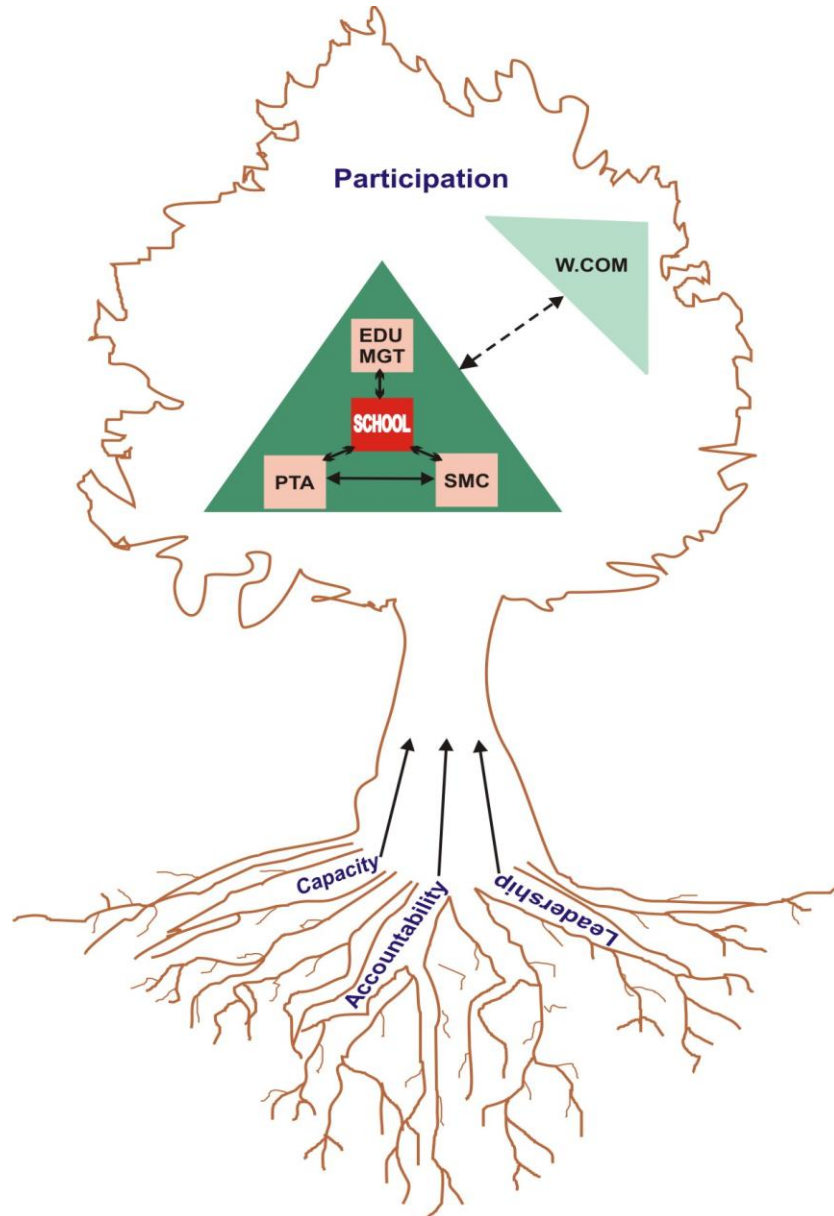
Fry (1983) also argues that children learn more effectively when parents and community play an active part in the life of the school and that this kind of engagement cannot and will not take place unless the community has enough power over its school to feel responsible for it. Henderson & Mapp (2002) suggest further that when the school's efforts reflect a sincere desire to engage parents and community members as partners in their children's education they respond positively.

Opening up the school and creating a friendly atmosphere would make parents feel welcome at any time considered necessary rather than the school being viewed as an alien environment. This would enable parents to have a better understanding of schooling; serve as motivation to follow up on their children's development; enhance their active participation; and improve their relationship with the school.

Based on these concepts and practices, Figure 3 is used to illustrate the conceptual framework for this study.

2.5.3 Framework for Conceptualising Community – School Relations

Figure 3:



Source: The author.

Figure 3 depicts my conceptualisation of community–school relations, based on the review of relevant literature which informed partly how this study was designed. It identifies the various actors in the community that relate to the school. For clarity, each box or triangle in Figure 3 represents a particular stakeholder group.

The large triangle represents official actors (i.e. SMC, PTA, school and education management – EDU MGT.), whilst the smaller triangle outside the large one (on the right) – W.COM – represents wider community members who have no official role prescription. Often in the international literature on education decentralisation this group does not receive as much empirical interest as the officially designated groups such as the SMC.

The two-way arrows are intended to demonstrate the ‘back and forth’ relationships and tensions between the school and the various actors who are at different ‘distances’ from the school. The two-way broken arrow between the school and the W.COM depicts the possible influences through informal relationship between W.COM and the school. The W.COM represents families, community members, the municipal assembly,, community leaders, and opinion leaders who may have a stake or show some interest in the school.

Education management (EDU MGT) represents the totality of the municipal directorate of education and all its agents, such as, circuit supervisors, education officers and the Municipal Education Planning Team (MEPT).

The framework anticipates that where participation between the wider community and the school increases, in other words where there is greater engagement, the gap - the zone of interaction - between it and the official actors (big triangle), decreases, bringing them closer together until it moves towards a higher degree of congruence, where the school, the PTA, SMC and the wider community see through a common lens and collaborate for school improvement.

This occurs when school and community see each other as genuine partners. It assumes an exchange of skills, abilities and interests between parents, teachers and the community based on mutual respect and the sharing of common goals for the benefit of the children and the school’s development. This study will test this assumption to see if and how it applies in the Ghanaian context.

What this model suggests further, is that participation is underpinned by the degree of the capacity of stakeholders, accountability and leadership at both school and community levels. The degree of strength of these ‘concepts’ in practice, determines the strength and

growth of the relationship i.e. participation, and shapes the environment that support effective community-school relations.

It should be noted – as indicated above – that education management in this instance determines the framework for policy implementation. It is included here to emphasise their role in the relationship between community (SMC/PTA/PARENTS, etc.) and school, which is the subject of investigation.

In this regard, this study's model seems to converge in a way with Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence that emphasises the relationship between school, families and communities and the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's theory of parental involvement in education. All three postulate a relationship that suggests the need for collaboration among parents, community and school for school improvement.

2.6 Research Questions

As indicated earlier, there seems to be dearth of contextual research information on how the relationship between communities and schools has been managed in the context of education decentralisation in poor rural communities. Considering the review of the literature and gaps identified the following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. In what ways have communities participated in the governance of schools?
2. How have community stakeholder groups understood their new roles in decentralised governance of schools and how have these been interpreted and executed?
3. What challenges emerge from such engagement with schools?
4. What factors shape community-school relations under decentralised management of schools and how do these factors affect community participation in education?
5. How have accountability and leadership in schools enhanced or limited community–school relations?

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology adopted for the study. The choice of methodology was guided by the research questions and is discussed along with issues associated with methods for data collection. The discussion includes an exposition of how the framework was designed, why qualitative methodology was adopted and the procedures used in collecting and analysing the data.

3.1 Developing the Research Framework

In any research study, the choice of design should be appropriate to the issue under investigation. The inquiry should be informed by questions of epistemology and the philosophical standpoint of the study (Cohen et al., 2001). In the background to this study, I argued that community participation has the potential to contribute to school improvement. It seemed desirable, therefore, to sample the views of stakeholders in the community and in the school in order to throw more light on this proposition.

The two dominant schools of thought and approaches in social science research, the quantitative and the qualitative paradigms, adopt distinct strategies or methods by which data is collected. Both schools of thought hold a social view of reality which says that the purpose of scientific inquiry is to determine its characteristics.

Quantitative research is often conceptualised by its practitioners as having a logical structure in which theories determine the problems to which researchers address themselves in the form of hypotheses derived from general theories. Thus, it is often depicted as deriving from a natural science understanding of how knowledge about the social world should be generated and maintains that reality is underpinned by unchangeable natural laws and objects that systematic scientific inquiry can reveal. The quantitative approach views human phenomena as being amenable to objective study and has its roots in positivism (Bryman, 1988).

Quantitative researchers argue that reality is independent of context or human perception, and that these natural laws do not vary with time, place or circumstances (Easton, 1996).

Quantitative research procedures involve the testing of hypotheses in order to determine social facts and law-like generalisations about the social world.

In contrast, the critiques of this position (the quantitative paradigm), argue that there is a fundamental difference between the study of natural objects and human beings, in that human beings themselves interpret situations and give meaning to them (Vulliamy et al., 1990). What this group stresses is that the multiple facets of 'reality' are perceived by people in different ways, according to how things work for them. In this way, there would be different meanings and different interpretations of 'reality' according to the needs of individuals in their own contexts. In effect, individuals 'construct' their own knowledge and learn from it.

Many qualitative researchers believe that the best way to understand any phenomenon is to view it in its context. They see all quantification as limited in nature, looking only at one small portion of a reality that cannot be split or unitized without losing the importance of the whole phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2001). For some qualitative researchers, the best way to understand what's going on is to become immersed in it; move into the culture or organization you are studying and experience what it is like to be a part of it and be flexible in your inquiry of people in context (Patton, 1990).

Thus, rather than approaching measurement with the idea of constructing a fixed instrument or set of questions, questions should be allowed to emerge and change as one becomes familiar with what one is studying. Many qualitative researchers also operate under different ontological assumptions about the world. They don't assume that there is a single unitary reality apart from perceptions people hold. Having considered these two research paradigms, I then had to consider which of these approaches best suited the intended study, bearing in mind its objectives.

3.2 The Choice of Methodology

The objective of this study was an exploratory one: to determine how the policy on community participation in schools had been translated at the local level in terms of the relationship between community and school. This required the soliciting of the individual experiences of schools and communities in terms of their engagement in the

administration of schools, and in the context of decentralised education management. It was therefore necessary to adopt the qualitative research approach that most suited this objective to gathering the relevant data.

A qualitative research approach has been described as:

One in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives (i.e. the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e. political, issue-oriented, collaborative, or change oriented) or both. It also uses strategies of enquiry such as narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies. The researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data (Creswell, 2003 p18).

This approach was thus necessary, in view of the fact that the study sought to explore the experiences of individuals and groups who were part of the engagement between the school and the community, and unravel the stories behind these experiences. Creswell (2003 p30) again observes that:

One of the chief reasons for conducting a qualitative study is that the study is exploratory. This means that not much has been written about the topic or population being studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to participants and build an understanding based on their ideas.

The choice of a qualitative research approach was also informed by the need to gain deep insights into the complex relations between the community, as defined by its geographical location, and the school within the community. In this regard, an attempt was made not only to explore individual experiences, but also the varied meanings and interpretations of the different actors in the field, using relevant strategies and techniques to elicit the necessary information.

A criticism levelled against qualitative design is the issue of validity. This is due to the high level of subjectivity and the difficulty in determining the authenticity of findings. However, Miles & Huberman (1994) observe that the meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility and 'confirmability', thus ensuring validity.

In addition, triangulation in qualitative research design controls the margin of error and ensures validity. This is usually done by obtaining descriptions, judgements and assessments of critical phenomena from several different points of view, several different observers and by two or more different methods. This process is adopted to reduce the likelihood of any misinterpretation, redundancy or oversight that could occur during the procedure of data collection, while also acknowledging that no observation or interpretation is perfectly repeatable (Stake, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994 p241). Indeed, replication of the same methods; the same sample; the same social situations and conditions; the same analytical constructs and premises cannot be achieved in naturalistic inquiry (Cohen et al., 2001 p119).

Cohen et al. (2001) argue that reliability is not only a matter of replication but includes fidelity to real-life context and situation specificity; authenticity; detail; honesty; depth of response; and meaningfulness to the respondents (Cohen et al., 2001 p241). For Kvale, the quality of the 'craftsmanship' of investigation, which includes continually checking, questioning and theoretically interpreting the findings, lies in how validity is ensured in qualitative design (Kvale, 1996). This also represents the integrity and trustworthiness of the researcher.

In this study, I made it a point of selecting respondents 'rich in information', whose views were critical in addressing the research questions. These were people who by the nature of their function had been involved in the life of the school or community as the case may be, and who over the years, had accumulated a wealth of knowledge based on their own experience and that of those around them. Thus, they may have had their own opinions and perceptions based on these experiences.

The main groups sampled were members of the SMC and the PTA. However, with the intention of voicing and fairly representing the multiple and sometimes conflicting viewpoints of other stakeholders and actors in the field, (namely, community members and parents), some members of the wider community were also sampled in order to provide further insights into the subject matter and also for triangulation purposes.

This was considered necessary since I thought there could be instances – as indicated in the conceptual framework – where some of these informal relationships between the school and the larger community might have far-reaching consequences with regard to education service delivery and the relationship between community and school.

For example, the MEPT is mainly composed of retired educationalists and others of good academic and social standing living in the community, who interact with the schools and the education office on a regular basis. They help with the planning and preparation of school performance improvement programmes (SPIPs) and provide various support for the school, as well as performing advocacy functions on behalf of the school and the District Education Office (DEO) when intervention is necessary.

The MEOC is the highest education supervisory body in the municipality. With their backgrounds and the kind of information the people in these groups held, and considering the exploratory nature of the study, I considered it expedient to interview a range of individuals in order to gain various perspectives on community–school relations. As retired education officers and other accomplished individuals living in the municipality, I believed that their views and experiences would be devoid of loyalty to either school or community. Moreover, in hindsight, I realised that they were in a better position to reflect more deeply on such a relationship and proffer ideas on what and how it was shaped.

3.3 Research Design

It is worth noting that in social and educational research, respondents may construct their own consciousness and reality from interrelated but divergent views. Qualitative research calls for a greater amount of flexibility in research design and data collection. In this sense, it focuses on social interactions with a practically naturalistic approach that involves moving back and forth between inductive, open-ended and phenomenological approaches to issues (Vulliamy et al., 1990; Patton, 1990). Qualitative research adopts a holistic perspective by providing a contextual understanding of the complex interrelationships between causes and effects that affect human behaviour (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984). Allowing the use of interviews and observations, it assesses the information around issues in depth.

This flexibility afforded me the opportunity to capture important details that would not have been covered in a survey of opinion. As a researcher, I had the opportunity to interact with participants in their social setting. Again, this enabled me to go into a considerable amount of detail concerning participants' views and gain deep insights into their experiences through face to face interaction. Some of these encounters centred on their own motivations for becoming involved with the school or community; the challenges and frustrations that confronted them; the misunderstandings and misinterpretations associated with action and inaction; the power play, both within and between different interest groups; and the politics and accompanying tensions and conflicts that underlay all these behaviours.

Although qualitative research design has some inherent level of subjectivity, the meanings emerging from this approach are what were sought in order to allow a much deeper understanding of the perspectives of those who had experience of the participation of communities in schools. Such understanding is important if we are to appreciate the reasons why things occur the way they do in such contexts and how they prompt new approaches to policy on community participation in schooling and its implementation.

These viewpoints support my choice of methodology for this design, since a research method is determined by the nature of the research questions (Cohen et al., 2001): some demand a large and comprehensive dataset, while others are better suited to small and focused case studies (Fullan, 1991).

Having decided to position this study in the qualitative methodology tradition, the next focus was the choice of approach to adopt for collecting data. Miles & Huberman assert that:

Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people's 'lived experience', are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on events, processes and structures in their lives; their perceptions, assumptions, prejudgements, presuppositions ... and connecting these meanings to the social world around them (Miles & Huberman, 1994 p10).

In this study, 'lived experiences' in terms of what stakeholders (groups and individuals) have experienced in their engagement with school and community, and the stories behind

such experiences, were explored in order to understand the nature and what shapes the relationship between the school and the community. This included taking into account personal and group interactions between individuals and groups that engaged with the school and the community; the opinions and beliefs of both school and community; and individuals within these groupings.

The characteristics of qualitative research discussed above are all typical and common to the different qualitative approaches, such as the case study, ethnography and grounded theory. They all employ interviews, field observation, documentary evidence and historical narratives, and stress the indispensable role of the researcher in the research design. However, beyond these similarities lie the differences in data collection and analysis that are mostly dependent on the theoretical positions and focus of the study. Additionally, in all cases validation of data can be reached through the application of a form of methodological triangulation, by using techniques such as observation, interviews and documents. In this study, interviews and documentary evidence were employed.

3.4 The Case Study Approach

The topic of this study is essentially contextual, in the sense that the researched communities have specifically defined profiles – they are fishing, farming and trading communities – that are key to the manner in which school–community relations are constructed and the meanings attached to them. With respondents of different perspectives, backgrounds and experiences, using a case study design is most appropriate as this enables the realisation of context-specific insights and reveals the ways they shape the interactions I seek to explore. This approach allows me to probe deeply and closely analyse people's views and perceptions in the targeted schools and communities (Cohen et al., 2001); and helps in explaining why relations occur as they do (Sturman, 1999).

In essence, what a case study does is allow a contemporary phenomenon to be thoroughly investigated within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly drawn (Yin, 2003). School–community interaction may be considered to be the contemporary phenomenon, as it has assumed considerable significance in the decentralisation of education management and EFA policy.

Furthermore, case studies allow the accommodation of a variety of disciplinary perspectives (Merriam, 1998).

This research is concerned with the study of the case of how the policy on community participation has been implemented in Mfantseman Municipality in terms of the relationship between community and school. The decision to adopt a case study approach stems from the belief that it can provide deeper insights, discovery and interpretation than hypothesis testing could. As Yin (2003) observes, the case study is a design particularly suited to situations in which it is impossible to separate the variables of a phenomenon from its context. In this regard, I argue that the underpinnings of community participation in schooling which are predicated by certain socio-economic and cultural factors; the intrinsic desire of every community to aspire to reach the heights of development; participation; leadership; and politics are variables which cannot be separated from their context.

Feagin et al. (1991) state that case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed, and that it is designed to elicit details from the viewpoint of the participants by using simple multiple sources of data. In the view of Marshall & Rossman (2006), the case study takes the researcher into the setting with all vividness and detail. Indeed, perhaps the central virtue of the case study – and one of my major reasons for opting for this strategy – is that quite a small number of carefully selected respondents can provide relatively accurate and representative information about a very large population (Yin, 2003).

In order to demonstrate the reliability and validity of the case study, a multi-method approach to the research was undertaken. Hitchcock & Hughes (1989) point out that triangulation is central to achieving credibility and a holistic response to the issue of validity and reliability. Tellis (1997) states that the rationale for using multiple sources of data is the triangulation of evidence. According to him, triangulation increases the reliability of data and the process of gathering it, and serves to corroborate data gathered from other sources. He further states that case studies are multi-perspective analyses, since the researcher considers not just the voices and perspectives of individual actors but also relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them, which is a unique characteristic of the case study.

All methods of social research have their weaknesses and limitations. To opt, therefore, for a case study approach was not intended as a denial of the value of other ways of collecting evidence. Other research strategies may be more appropriate in other situations.

However, the main problems with case studies are the difficulties in extrapolating generalisations and cross-checking, as the results are often viewed as biased, personal and subjective (Jaeger, 1997; Sturman, 1999; Cohen et al., 2001). Qualitative case studies are also subject to the degree of sensitivity and integrity of the investigator, since the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. The researcher is therefore left to rely on his or her own instincts and abilities throughout most of the research exercise. Indeed, Jaeger (1997) argues that using the case study method means seeing the situation through the eyes of the researcher.

3.5 Data Collection Methods and Techniques

From among the six primary sources of evidence for case study research identified by Yin (1994)⁷, interview and documentation were adopted for this study.

3.5.1 The Interview

An interview is a planned conversation between two or more people (the interviewer and the interviewee(s)), with the purpose of obtaining information from the interviewee on opinions, ideas, explanations or specific information on a topic of interest. In this particular study, I am guided by Patton's observation that:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe.... We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of the observer. We cannot observe how people have organised the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (Patton, 1990 p196).

⁷ Documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts.

The interview is a method that can foster face to face interaction with the respondents. It allows immediate follow up for clarification and the discovery of any nuances in culture. It provides contextual information and is useful for uncovering respondents' perspectives on issues. It is also good for obtaining data via non-verbal behaviour and communication (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Further strengths of the interview are that it focuses directly on the case study topic and provides insights into perceived causal inferences.

The interview was adopted for this study because it is one of the most convenient means of understanding human values and exploring views and experiences. Another advantage of using the interview is its adaptability and the opportunity it offers to obtain rich and in-depth information in order to appreciate a situation from other points of view and experience (Cohen et al., 2001; McNiff, 1988; Elliot, 1993; Silverman, 1993). In this study, such information was obtained from the school (head teacher and teachers), the community (PTA and SMC members) and other relevant stakeholders.

The interview method and the semi-structured guide stood out as the most appropriate means of investigating the participation of communities in schooling, which is the focus of this study. The structured interview, for example, was not considered appropriate because of its formal nature and its potential for 'destroying' a natural conversational atmosphere, and thus making it difficult for interviewees to discuss their experiences naturally and freely.

Secondly, using focused or a standard set of questions could have also made the study too narrow and restricted the research agenda (Burgess, 1982). But Dunne et al. (2005) again caution that the social relations of the interview are about power relations in the research. In this respect, "the researcher position is critical not only to the choice of interview type but its influence on the kind of quality the interview text produced" (p32).

A semi-structured interview guide was considered most useful in the circumstances, since this allowed me to ask participants pre-established key questions and at the same time, probe more deeply in response to interviewees' contributions (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). I also engaged in informal and unstructured interviews as and when it was considered appropriate, especially in situations in which it was likely to help me understand certain complexities of the relationship between school and community that were more nuanced

and required tact to unravel. With the kinds of community and people sampled, I soon realised that the more unstructured and informal conversational environment I created, the easier it would be for them to express their deep feelings and experiences, thus revealing profound insights into how the school and community interacted.

It is worth noting, however, that the interview as a method is prone to some limitations, such as being open to misinterpretation due to cultural differences between interviewer and interviewees. It is also susceptible to ethical dilemmas and dependent on respondents' openness, honesty and circumstances at the particular time of the interview. I therefore had to rely on interpersonal skills, vigilance and proficiency in conducting interviews acquired in previous engagements in order to minimise any bias that might have arisen (Kvale, 1996).

3.5.2 Documentary Data

The other data collection method that was used in this study was documentary evidence. One of the most important uses of documents is to corroborate evidence gathered from other sources (Tellis, 1997). The review of documents is an unobtrusive and non-reactive method that can be used to elicit information about stakeholders in the community.

Minutes of meetings, formal policy statements, logbooks, letters, memoranda and agendas were examined and found to be useful for developing an understanding (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) of how communities relate to schools and vice versa. The advantages of documentary data gathering are that it can be conducted without disturbing the setting; information can be validated; it is exact; and it can have broad coverage. According to Marshall & Rossman (ibid), a document review provides content information, and facilitates analysis, validity checks and triangulation. Moreover, data are easy to manage and categorise for analysis.

However, its weakness lies in the difficulty in retrieving data; biased selectivity; biased reporting (reflecting the author's own bias); and the occasional problems encountered in accessing documents. Another weakness is that analysis of the content of written material is subject to the prejudice of the researcher. Care was therefore taken to make logical inferences, in the knowledge that data could be open to multiple interpretations. In this

vein, I examined documents with my research questions in mind in order to extract information relevant to the study.

3.6 The Research Process

3.6.1 Sampling

Sampling in qualitative studies is considered to be an approach that must be systematically carried out, though not necessarily based on probability sampling, as would be the case with a quantitative study. Sampling is based on the conviction that the researcher may select a broad range of respondents or sites that are or have been directly involved in the issue under investigation.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents for the one-to-one interviews. Purposive sampling is a method in which researchers carefully select the cases to be included in the sample based on an assessment of their typicality (Cohen et al., 2001). In this way, a sample is built up that meets the specific needs of the researcher. The logic in purposive sampling invariably differs from the logic in probability sampling in statistics, which is more random. I chose this type of sampling in order to acquire the greatest possible knowledge of the issues appertaining to the research purpose. Cohen et al. (2000) however, acknowledge that while purposive sampling may satisfy the researcher's needs, it does not represent the wider population.

The selection of respondents was made with the assistance of the municipal director of education (MDE) and the heads of the schools under study. The MDE, who was my key informant, was used primarily in the selection of teachers at the two school sites and individuals in education management. A list of teachers in the two schools was produced. I provided the criteria for selection, which included teachers and heads of schools who had been in post for not less than three years and who preferably also lived in the community.

Similarly, those in education management and the other support groups (the MEPT and MEOC) were to have been in their various positions for not less than three years. Using these criteria, the MDE suggested some names, which I appraised with her. On two occasions, I indicated my preference for teachers who had not been selected by the MDE,

but otherwise met the criteria. I changed the selection because the MDE could not indicate any advantage of the teachers she had proposed over those I preferred.

In the case of community members, even though the MDE proposed some names, the choices were made only after talking to the heads of the two schools. Thus, the majority of names proposed by the MDE were corroborated by the two heads. This gave me the intuition that the right choices had been made under the circumstances.

Appendix 5 shows a table of the selection of the various categories of respondents.

3.6.2 The Case Study

I chose two state schools that represented the two broad community profiles in Mfantseman Municipality, namely, engagement in fishing and farming; and trading and commerce respectively. Thus, the data collected from these different environments would reflect the varied situations of local rural schools. As mentioned earlier, the conscription of children for farming, fishing and trading activities present challenges for quality education and school improvements. It was therefore hoped that decisions reflecting these broad divisions would make substantial progress in unearthing key issues with regard to how school and community interacted in addressing these challenges.

I obtained a list of public schools in Mfantseman Municipality, together with their community profiles. I selected seven schools that appeared to have the characteristics defined for choosing the study sites, namely situation in fishing and farming community or a trading community. Kuku was the only rural school that had the fishing and farming profile. Selection of CBS was because of its proximity to the BigTown market. BigTown is the centre of commercial activities in Mfantseman Municipality and has a very popular market. The CBS suburb and its school are both less than 200 metres from the market, so it was therefore deemed to meet the selection criteria of the study.

3.6.3 Negotiating Access

Access to participants was negotiated with the MDE and the heads of the selected schools. The MDE became the key informant, from whom much background information about the district and school statistics were obtained. This was because, by the nature of her job,

she interacted with virtually all the stakeholders in the education enterprise and, with her office serving as a repository of district data, her assistance in reaching such people was critical.

Aware of my identity and the possible influence of power relations, I decided to avoid short cuts and adhere to all the procedures a researcher was expected to observe. In this regard, formal consent by official application was obtained from the MDE to contact heads of schools chosen for the case study. Details of how issues about my identity were managed are discussed in section 3.9.

3.7 The Data Collection Process

As indicated in section 3.5, the data collection methods used in this study were interviews and documentary search. The processes adopted in the implementation of each of these methods are described below under separate headings. A research framework was designed to facilitate the collection of data. In designing this framework due consideration was given to the research questions, and the methods and instruments that could best elicit the information required. See Appendix 6 for details for the research framework.

3.7.1 Documentary Search

Research question two sought to establish stakeholders' understanding of their roles, and how this enabled them to reposition themselves for engagement with the school. SMC/PTA handbooks, head teachers' manuals, and training programmes and manuals were examined to ascertain the type and nature of orientation they (the SMC/PTA) went through by way of preparation and knowledge acquisition to facilitate their engagement with the school or the community. Minutes of SMC and PTA meetings were also examined. When found necessary some decisions in the SMC or PTA minutes were traced to reports or financial statements. As I read through the documents, I noted the relevant pages and entered themes into my field notebook. Data analysis actually started in the field and I took advantage of my observations to immediately triangulate information obtained during the interview process.

3.7.2 Planning the Interviews

The next stage of the process was the development of the interview technique. A semi-structured interviewing schedule was developed and piloted. The interview guide was amended to reflect the feedback from the pilot. A list of all the identified participants was organised. Some were called and appointments made. I visited each one of them on either the school premises, at their work place or at their homes, as agreed with them earlier.

This procedure was undertaken mindful of Bell's (2005) views on the timing of interviews. Bell advises that, "people who agree to be interviewed deserve some consideration and so you will need to fit in with their plans, however inconvenient they may be for you" (Bell, 2005 p167). Consequently, I sought out my participants' preferences regarding convenient times for interviews, which they readily provided. However, in discussing and arranging days and times, rather than considering what was most convenient to them, virtually all the participants suggested that I should choose the time most convenient for me. Was this an issue about my identity? I wondered.

3.7.3 Conducting the Interview

Interviews were semi-structured, with open-ended questions to allow participants to express their individual views about the phenomenon under study. I took field notes and tape-recorded all interviews. For the field notes, I made detailed descriptions of the dialogues I had with respondents, the events, the physical settings and demographic details (Creswell, 2005). I also recorded reflective notes that captured the nonverbal cues that I gathered from the responses (ibid.). The tapes were transcribed verbatim as soon as possible after the interviews.

The interview process revealed areas of unique participant concern or importance that I did not initially anticipate, as well as areas of concern common to all participants. Throughout the interview and transcription process, I highlighted responses that appeared either especially relevant or that were similar to other responses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I also reviewed those responses that were different from others but had particular intensity or relevance to specific issues.

Even though I did not plan to use observation as a data collection method, having learnt from the initial interviews about pupils' behaviour when teachers are absent, I decided to triangulate by observations. For example, In the Kuku community, I visited the beach and walked through the town on different occasions to observe what pupils do when teachers were not around to teach (see photographs No. 3, p103). The scenes as captured in these photographs confirmed community members' observations on pupils' behaviour. On another occasion, at the CBS community, I observed a stakeholders' meeting at the CBS basic school on June 9, 2009, six months after the initial data collection (see photograph No. 4, p109).

3.8 Data Analysis

In the literature, emphasis is placed on developing a framework with the purpose of the research as the central focus. Marshall and Rossman suggest that in managing the voluminous data generated from a qualitative research study, the following staged procedure could be a guide:

- Organising the data.
- Generating categories, themes and patterns.
- Coding the data.
- Testing the emergent understandings, searching for alternative explanations.
- Writing the report. (Marshall & Rossman, 1999 p152)

What Marshall and Rossman emphasise is that the data is to be reduced, broken down into manageable chunks and interpreted at each stage, making meaning and giving insight into the words and actions of the respondents in the study. In the same vein, Yin, in Krueger and Casey, explains that: "data analysis consists of examining, categorising, tabulating or otherwise recombining the evidence, to address the initial propositions of a study" (Yin in Krueger & Casey, 2000 p125).

The basic task involved in a systematic management of data is to extract meanings underlying various issues raised during interviewing or observations. The tape-recorded interviews and discussions were transcribed verbatim from the oral to the written forms as notes. The hand written notes were later typed. I critically read the transcribed text several times, marking out statements relevant to the issues being investigated with highlighters to

identify themes and sub-themes. In the process, the data were read thoroughly to identify the common themes, which were then coded.

Coding has been described as a means of identifying and labelling concepts and phrases in interview transcripts and field notes. Coding helps to dissect concepts and phrases meaningfully and at the same time keep the relationship between the parts intact. Miles & Huberman describe it as:

...tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to 'chunks' of varying size – words, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. They can take the form of a straightforward category label or a more complex one [e.g. a metaphor]. (Miles & Huberman, 1994 p56)

In order to identify patterns of relationship from the data at this stage, Miles and Huberman advocate that it is necessary to bring to mind the research questions or the purpose of the study. They consider this as essential to keep focused on the topic under investigation, especially when the piles of data obtained all seem to matter.

“...Conceptual frameworks and research questions are the best defence against overload. They also reflect a point made earlier that data collection is inescapably a selective process...” (Miles and Huberman, 1994 p55).

The initial stage of data analysis entailed the preparation of interview summaries for the 48 respondents. First, as noted above, I transcribed each audiotape and made detailed notes for each interviewee's response. A descriptive analysis followed which gave me an idea of the views of each participant and sorted the data that would actually answer the research questions. This stage of analysis included the search for patterns and themes regarding stakeholder perceptions of their roles, factors that influenced community – school relations and what appeared to be the drivers of participation.

While conducting this analysis, I recorded my personal observations concerning the possible significance of patterns, and any analytical insights and interpretations that emerged during data collection. I then assigned the emerging ideas and patterns to

categories. Additionally, I considered groups such as the SMC; the PTA; the wider community; opinion leaders and the municipal education directorate as levels of analysis.

In managing the data, over twenty categories/themes emerged. These included volunteering, conflicts, role definitions, opportunity cost of participation, parental roles, capacity, community expectations, inspection and many more. These were grouped into broad themes, such as, stakeholder roles, participation, accountability, leadership and school governance and were managed in a way that reflected what the research questions sought to find. I also ensured that these themes were grouped to reflect the perspectives of individual stakeholder groups in the study.

Whilst there were agreements in some of the viewpoints raised by stakeholders regarding aspects of stakeholder functions and the opportunity cost of participation, there were also disagreements on role definitions, volunteering and community and school expectations, among others.

The entire fieldwork was iterative rather than linear. To some extent, it was also participatory, as there were 'member checks' (effort made after initial data compilation and analysis to verify with respondents) at different stages (Easton, 1996). A summary of findings was written up to be used at the analysis and discussion phase.

I must mention that during the write up of the thesis I considered it necessary to do some minor editing of some portions of the transcripts to facilitate clarity in reading. This was to make the quotations readable and accessible to readers unfamiliar with Ghanaian idioms, local phrases and words used and to give meaning to readers. Pseudonyms were also used for personal names, the two communities, schools and towns. Lastly, the data were discussed using other theoretical perspectives gleaned from the literature to establish points of departure and corroboration with existing knowledge. This is presented in Chapters 4, 5 & 6.

3.9 Identity Issues

There was a kind of duality around the issue of my identity. First, it had to do with my role and identity as a researcher. The second was my position as permanent secretary of the Ministry of Education and my standing in Ghanaian society as a member of the Council of State⁸. I was thus aware of the potential challenges that could limit my access to informants who would be prepared to divulge a significant amount of information without feeling intimidated.

For example, the management of issues regarding access, power, confidentiality, anonymity, and establishing a congenial atmosphere between respondents and myself, were things I envisaged could reduce the effects of my identity on the research findings if handled well. Perhaps my initial encounter with the MDE, who initially couched every conversation we had in an official manner, provided some insights into what was to be expected and signalled the need to be strategic in managing the research process in a way that would mitigate the effects of my identity.

One of my hunches was the likelihood of respondents handling the interview process in an official mode, instead of being themselves and answering questions as they would have answered any other person. I wondered if they would open up or be cautious and economical with the truth, or if they would exaggerate, for various reasons, in some cases. I do not therefore contend that my relationship with informants was devoid of any power relation, since the way informants perceived me was likely to have created a different situation.

Coterill and Letherby (1994) discuss the identity and roles of researchers in a research environment familiar to the researcher. They are of the view that an individual's identity in relation to a research topic can influence the research process. They argue that when informants can identify themselves experientially with the researcher, especially in highly emotive issues, their fears and inhibitions are allayed and they are able to engage in informative talk with the researcher. This comes from empathic understanding between the researcher and the researched.

⁸ A 25 member presidential advisory group who advises the President of the republic of Ghana on all matters and are consulted on all public appointments.

What I gather from Coterill & Letherby's view is that it is not only the manner in which the field process is managed that matters, but also the position of the researcher in the research. I presume that understanding my role as perceived by informants and their roles was very important. Thus, to avoid becoming over identified, as described above, I managed to establish close contact with informants and forged relationships in very fundamental ways. I was sensitive to the context of the research and that means being familiar with the terrain, understanding the socio-cultural inter-relational complexities of the environment.

Dunne et al. (2005) also caution that "power is inextricably a part of knowledge and flows universally through our discursive exchanges and shapes not only the interpretation of the social events we study, but also how we conceive and pursue the social actions that constitute our research" (p13). In this regard, they continue, "decisions about method, for example, the form of the interview, need to be informed by the research relations between researcher and respondent alongside the substantive concerns" (p32). Thus, in addition to the more technical descriptions, questions about how the researcher and respondent(s) will relate to each other in the interview are of paramount importance.

The ability to immerse myself in their beliefs and practices in order to minimise such extraneous factors was carefully handled. For instance, my knowledge of two local languages, (Fanti and Twi), gave me the opportunity to easily communicate with them.

There was also the issue of trust to deal with. Establishing a rapport with respondents was therefore not an option but an imperative. Being conscious of this, I decided to accept the fact that I could not change my situation or what people perceived about me, but took steps that I felt were likely to mitigate the effects of influences that could affect the outcomes of the research.

Among the steps I took were the following: I visited the community twice before the interview and had meals or snacks with some of the teachers; I called each of the respondents to confirm the appointment and to find out how they were; and on the day of an interview, I dressed casually and drove my own private car instead of my duty vehicle with driver. As to the extent to which these strategies helped in reducing bias, that could not be quantified but I trusted that it was to some extent mitigated.

I had an excellent reception everywhere I went, especially in the municipal education office. Even though I was mindful of my identity, many of the people I came into contact with for the first time did not give any indication that they were intimidated or felt inferior to me. Their readiness to co-operate and volunteer information was remarkable, especially at the municipal education office where my cover was blown by the MDE before I had even introduced myself. These positive attitudes could also be attributed to the influence of the MDE, who I had used not only as my key informant, but through whom I negotiated access to many of the participants.

The reality, however, is that accessing participants through the MDE had its own implications. Could there have been a feeling of unacknowledged coercion on the part of the participants, since it was the MDE asking them to grant the interview? Again, if they knew that I was the MDE's 'boss', that alone could make them wish to 'save her face' by according me the highest level of co-operation.

This notwithstanding, in the schools, the participants did not appear to pay any particular attention to who I was because they did not know me, or probably did not understand or appreciate the importance of my position and the weight that position and the personality carried. Therefore, my identity did not mean much to them. Some of them hinted that they had granted interviews to a number of people – from NGOs and the universities and inquired if I were one of them. To them, therefore, I was one of those people who had come for information and since they had been briefed by the MDE, they felt obliged to extend courtesy to me in the same manner they would to any other person. It is worth mentioning that I was not confronted with any resistance throughout the period of the study. Rather, participants co-operated fully at all times.

I must mention, however, that the effects of familiarity within a research, particularly qualitative research such as was in this study is like a two-edged sword. It has both positive and negative consequences, which was a concern. As a researcher, I needed to be conscious not to influence participants in any direction that would distort their account of information. At the same time, I needed to be flexible and help allay any fear or inhibition and reduce unequal power relations, to ensure that maximum information was divulged.

But given that in qualitative studies, the role and influences of the researcher cannot be totally eroded, I tried as much as possible to reduce any possible bias. For instance, I needed at certain times to remain detached from discussion or conversations in order to take that data and interpret it. This is not to say that I was feeling superficial or was not close enough to know what was happening. I most times managed a balanced or neutral position. But the question one may ask is whether there is any such thing as value-free qualitative research? This is because the ways in which participants perceived me might have to some extent skewed the data.

Consequently, I believe that no research can be wholly value-free as both the researcher and the researched have some personal views, attitudes and values that may affect the research. The extent to which the researcher manages the process to minimise the influence is what I consider to be of supreme importance.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Some researchers have discussed and summarised the ethical dilemmas that confront the educational researcher, notably the issue of gaining access, informed consent, confidentiality, and usage of sensitive data (Burgess, 1989; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The Sussex School of Education and Social Work Guidelines on Standards on Research Ethics further stipulates among others, the need to safeguard the interests and rights of those involved or affected by the research (See Appendix 7). These ethical considerations, aimed at reducing risks to participants and enhancing the trustworthiness as well as credibility of the research, have been observed in this study.

At the start of the fieldwork I informed participants how the process of collecting data would be done and why they were being asked to contribute through interviews. I made very clear to those interviewed my role as researcher and also my position in the Ministry of Education. Interestingly once participants became aware of my professional identity they seem to see this as an opportunity to get their message or feelings across to me, I suppose because for them this was as close as possible they could come to expressing their opinions to someone in Education leadership. I did however make it clear that no one was obliged to take part. Each participant was asked to give his or her permission to be tape-recorded. All participants consented to this.

In reporting and discussing my findings participants were named only by their roles. However, there were very few role holders who might be easily identified because of their unique role, for example, the Municipal Director of Education (MDE), and the Municipal Chief Executive (MCE). Pseudonyms were used for the schools and communities they represented and obvious examples where I felt anonymity might be compromised were eliminated. For example, on the use of capitation grant and photographs where people might be recognised I presented the data in such a way as to make reference to sources difficult to trace. Sometimes respondents asked for specific comments to be “off record” or “just between you and me”. I ensured that their comments were not used as quotes, rather reflected the issues generally as part of my understanding of what was going on. As time went on in the field I sensed from the frank comments and views expressed that participants were confident that what they said to me was purely for my understanding in the research, and I have ensured that the data and the way it has been reported in this study does not in any way betray their trust and collaboration.

3.11 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative approaches to research, and how my choice of approach was determined by the purpose and focus of the study. I have also discussed the methods and techniques used in collecting qualitative data and the steps that needed to be taken to ensure its validity. I particularly discussed the interview and documentary search methods, as the data collection and triangulation tools used in this study.

The multiple voices of various stakeholders with different perspectives, and documentary analysis and observation, served as further means of triangulating the data. Issues of informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and my identity, all of which had ethical undertones, have also been addressed. I have discussed how the data collected were processed from a raw state to an analysed state, which included the transcription of data, coding, categorisation, theme identification and summarising. Issues of researcher identity and power relations and how these were managed have also been discussed extensively. In the next three chapters (chapters 4, 5 & 6), I present the analysis of my findings from the different stakeholder perspectives.

Chapter Four: Stakeholder Roles in Practice: Multiple Perspectives

4.0 Introduction

One of the objectives of this study was to discover how the various actors involved in community–school relationships understood the implications of decentralised education management, and how they interpreted their roles and executed them in their engagement with schools. This section thus focuses on SMCs, PTAs, the school’s participation in the lives of communities, parental roles as well as the role of the ‘elite’ in the community. Challenges that arose as a result of such engagement within and between these groups, as well as with schools, such as, the lack of capacity, power and conflict in community – school relationships are also highlighted.

4.1 Participation as ‘Fiscal’ and ‘Physical’ Support

By definition, SMCs are supposed to exercise general oversight over schools without getting involved in the day to day administration of them (See SMC/PTA Roles – Appendix 5). Their general areas of responsibility surround school policy, financial management and the mobilisation of both financial and physical resources. In the performance of these functions, however, the educational backgrounds and life experiences of members, as well as their knowledge base of how schools should function, among other factors, have determined the extent of their involvement in school governance.

A major function of SMCs that almost all respondents in both CBS and Kuku communities alluded to was the provision of necessary school resources, especially during times when there were delays and shortfalls in government funding and transfers. SMCs and PTAs saw this as a responsibility and consequently pooled their resources for the benefit of the school. According to one circuit supervisor, communities had built schools, toilets; provided roofing sheets and furniture; and paid teachers’ salaries, and that often this was done when the school needed help in one way or the other:

When there is a rain storm, which often happens in this area, the roofs of many of our classroom blocks are ripped off. In some communities, nearby churches are temporary [sic] used for school, or the chief’s palace. Requests

to the district assembly and the GES⁹ headquarters take years, so the SMC/PTA mobilise resources from the community to fix it. Other times, the chief provides the roofing sheets (circuit supervisor: 11/10/08).

Another community member said:

Recently through funds from the PTA and labour provided by us a new classroom block has been built (Community member [CBS]: 09/12/08).

Photograph 1: CBS Basic School - old classroom block (right) and new classroom block (left) (built with community support)



Source: Author's Field Photos

Corroborating these comments, some SMC members recounted how a few years previously, children had carried their own chairs and tables to school, compelling both SMC and PTA to make yearly provision for the supply of furniture to the school. One of them had this to say:

Until three years ago pupils carried their tables and chairs to school at the beginning of each term because government did not supply them with school furniture. The few that were supplied were distributed to the lower classes so in collaboration with the PTA, tables and chairs were provided. (SMC member [CBS]: 27/11/08)

The MDE and others further observed that the collaboration of the PTA and SMC in support of the school meant a lot, not only to the school but to education management as well. According to the MDE even though estimates for the running of schools were

⁹ GES stands for the Ghana Education Service

provided for in the district budget, financial releases from the government were often delayed, compelling schools to turn to their SMCs and PTAs for assistance.

When these financial releases are delayed by the headquarters, a lot of pressure is brought on my office. Head teachers and SMCs constantly come there to follow-up. The mobilisation of funds by the SMCs and particularly, the PTAs to support some school activities in the interim is always a welcome relief (MDE: 11/10/08).

She continued:

One of our biggest problem was that sometimes the funds are not received at all for a whole term and you know, with these poor communities there is a limit as to what they can do to help (MDE: 11/10/08).

As the levy of fees of any kind by schools was prohibited, with the knowledge of the education directorate, schools sometimes used their PTAs to circumvent this ruling. Thus, in response to government failure to provide for essential needs, the PTA themselves collected levies to provide resources for the school. Examples of these are allowances paid to teachers, payments for sporting activities, printing of 'mock' examination questions, extra tuition for the examination class and advances to new teachers, who had not been paid for over a year.

The Head teacher at CBS remarked:

Our SMC and PTA show a lot of concern when releases are delayed. But for them many activities in the SPIP could not have been done because sometimes the government's releases are received half way through the term (head teacher: 24/11/08).

Many community members understood this as one of their major functions. To them being there for the school in times of need meant community participation, as this parent indicates.

If we don't support the school it is our own children who will suffer, so once we hear that there is a need we all do our best to support. This the way we also share in the problems of the school (community member [CBS]: 08/12/08)

4.2 Participation as ‘Inspection’

A common thread emerging from SMC members’ views is one in which they regarded their role as ‘inspectors’ of schools. It appeared that in some cases, SMCs saw themselves as ‘watchmen’, who were there to ensure that schools performed to the best of their abilities. For example, the SMC chairman at Kuku and the treasurer visited the school at least twice a week unannounced.

Our main responsibility is to visit the school from time to time. When visiting, we do not give them prior information. We go there unannounced and inform the headmaster that we are there to visit the school. However, we don’t go there together as a team. Sometimes we go through their exercise books and check if the teachers are present and are teaching, so that is how we do our work (SMC member [Kuku]: 03/11/08).

Visiting a school twice a week could be viewed as an encroachment on the school management’s domain. Even though these visits seemed uncoordinated, it appears that they were well-intentioned as the following comment suggests:

We didn’t mean any harm and we are not against anybody. Because our children complain that their teachers do not come to school, we decided to see things for ourselves. That is why we check them (SMC member [Kuku]: 03/11/08).

These unannounced and uncoordinated visits were not always well received, especially by the teachers as the following reveals:

On one occasion, during a visit by the chairman and the treasurer of the SMC, I refused to give them my pupils’ books on demand, and this led to a quarrel between us in front of the class until the head teacher intervened (teacher [Kuku]: 22/10/08).

Another teacher from Kuku recalled an encounter with an SMC member who questioned why she had arrived at school late, which led to a heated exchange between the two. The teacher had apparently been invited by the MDE to serve on the district cultural festival planning committee and they had met earlier in the morning at the director’s office, hence her late arrival at school. The co-ordination of such extra-curricula duties was the responsibility of the school administration. Hence, the teacher was incensed by the fact that for whatever reason, she should have been officially noted as late by the school and

not by an SMC member. Some aspects of her complaint is reflected in the following comment:

What annoys us most is that sometimes when they come here they try to give instructions to us when we really don't report to them. Since I clashed with them no one has come to me again (teacher [Kuku]: 23/10/08).

This role assumed by some of the SMC members appeared to have threatened cordial relations between the school and those who should have been there to support its improvement agenda, as this teacher's comment makes clear: "At times you don't know who is really in charge of the school" (teacher [Kuku]: 22/10/08).

Although some teachers were not enthused by the frequency of SMC visits, the head teachers appeared to be more tolerant, making some teachers conclude that the head teachers apparently feared losing the support of the SMC, and had therefore - it seemed - abdicated leadership and management responsibilities to it, as indicated by the following comment.

"We teachers always complained about these visits but master [the head teacher] never acted on our protests for fear that he may lose their support" (teacher [Kuku]: 22/10/08).

Another said:

I don't understand what they want; everybody has his role. We were trained as teachers and we have the responsibility to manage the school. Why should people who don't have any idea about education and management be allowed to interfere with our work? (teacher [Kuku]: 22/10/08).

However, according to some teachers, with a few exceptions, particularly in the case of those with some level of education, the SMC often had no wish to interfere in school management issues. One teacher remarked:

It is not all the SMC members who disturb us. Its only about three of them or so who bring about this confusion. They think they know everything and seem to have taken over the SMC (teacher [Kuku]: 24/10/08)

Thus, SMCs attempted to hold schools accountable for pupils' progress, but their actions risked undermining teacher autonomy and agency, as the above views suggest. Clearly,

SMCs were concerned about the academic performance of schools, but their methods of directly attempting to inspect teachers' work was seen as a threat to their professional autonomy and threatened teacher morale. Furthermore, it appears that the school and SMC had different conceptions of what their respective roles were or should be.

In its capacity as a school board, the SMC was expected to concern itself broadly with overall management, without getting involved in the day-to-day running of the school. However, according to some SMC members' perception of their function in facilitating community mobilisation of resources for the school, they should have had a much more active role. One member remarked:

Why is it that when we try to let them do what they are supposed to do they are not happy, but when they need assistance then they ask us to help. Why do they expect us to put our money in the school and sit back unconcerned? (SMC member [Kuku]: 03/11/08).

As far as the SMC was concerned, the school and their teachers needed to come to terms with the fact that community members could do more than make financial contributions if they were granted the room to do so.

In contrast to the SMC's attitude and methods of involvement with the school, the PTA appeared to view its role rather differently. PTA members generally seemed to assume a more supportive and advocacy-based stance in attempting to 'educate' the community of parents about their responsibilities, as the following comment from a PTA chairman suggests:

What we do is that we normally invite the parents to the school and talk to them that they are *destroying* the children's future by taking them out for fishing. After receiving complaints from the school, we arranged with them [the school] to check on the children's attendance two times a week [my emphasis] (PTA chairman [Kuku]: 10/11/08).

This exemplifies how the PTA initiated steps to improve school attendance by sensitising community members about their responsibilities. The message from this advocacy stance is that the education of pupils required the collaboration of parents, community and school which supports the conceptual framework of this study (see chapter 2 section 2.5).

The regularity of PTA visits to routinely check on pupils' attendance was actually seen by the teachers and heads as being supportive of the school's mission, with the focus more on the pupils and less on the teachers. In scheduling their (PTA) visits, they signalled to the school management its recognition that they (school) were in charge and gave it the opportunity to appreciate the role that the PTA played. The PTA chairman at Kuku indicated:

We have a major role to play as PTA since we have a direct interest in the school because of our children. We discuss school matters with them and only come in to help when the need arises but when we are not happy about something, we tell them (PTA chairman [Kuku]: 10/11/08).

The PTA approach gives the impression that it appreciated that the development of pupils was a collaborative effort by all who had a stake in their well-being. But the question is why would the PTA and the SMC have such different approaches in trying to address problems confronting the school? Could the accommodation of the PTA be as a result of their direct stake in the school because of their children or is it as a result of the different perceptions and interpretations they each gave to their respective roles?

4.3 The Importance of Capacity in Stakeholder Functions

When asked about the execution of their roles in the four main areas of school governance – namely, school policy, school development, school administration and finance – SMC members in both schools seemed not much aware of these responsibilities. Their responses to the questions regarding the degree of their involvement in the affairs of the school indicated that their involvement focused mostly on aspects of school development issues such as, maintenance of school structures and furniture; ensuring safe and healthy school environments; and maintaining links with the PTA for resource mobilisation. With very few exceptions, knowledge of policy, administration and finance was limited and they confessed that they relied on briefings from the head teacher and the SMC chairman. The CBS school PTA chairman who represents the PTA on the SMC pointed out that:

On general matters affecting the children and the school's welfare, both the PTA and the SMC show a lot of interest but when we are discussing examination results and making analysis and comparisons only the few who are educated participate (PTA chairman [CBS]: 01/12/08).

At the Kuku School about three SMC members pointed out that they were often not sure what questions to ask about school finances or the school performance improvement plans (SPIPs) presented at meetings. According to them they preferred instead to keep quiet than to show their ignorance on these issues.

When they present a report, we can't challenge anybody because we don't understand. It is only the SMC and the PTA chairmen and one or two people who understand, so we leave everything to them. If they say yes, then we all agree by raising our hands (SMC member [CBS]: 27/11/08).

A community member who is also an SMC member had this to say:

I am a carpenter so the head teacher and the SMC chairman send for me when there are furniture repairs, but when it is on other things where you need high education background they don't invite me. (SMC member [Kuku]: 27/11/08).

There is the potential of this lack of active participation in the core business of the school to undermine accountability. For example, at PTA general meetings and SMC meetings, the head teacher is supposed to present progress report on achievements; the specific needs of the school; a financial report and future plans; and problems and possible solutions, amongst other things. It is difficult to see how such reporting could be scrutinised properly if some SMC members feel incapable of probing the head teachers' accounts. For example, regarding SMC roles the head teachers' handbook stipulates that:

"The SMC should ensure that head teachers present annual plan of action for review and approval of its first meeting in the year. Receive termly reports from the head teachers and advise on emerging pertinent issues" (*Head teachers Handbook*, p76)

Guidelines for the Distribution and Utilisation of the Capitation Grant Scheme also makes the point that:

The SMC and the head teacher are responsible to ensure the effective utilisation of the capitation grant, implement activities as directed in the SPIPs and ensure proper accountability of all funds received and utilised in Schools (MOE, 2004 p3).

Some members of the SMC indicated that even though they were aware of this provision they could not insist on it when it was flouted. As one SMC member pointed out:

Even though we know that the school must report on many things we are not able to ask because we don't understand many of the school activities. Even on the capitation grant at times they do the accounts but we accept everything they tell us because we can't challenge them (SMC member [Kuku]: 03/11/08).

One of the issues raised by an SMC member in Kuku was the control of funds, whereby some alleged that before the introduction of the capitation grant, some of the school's budget was misapplied to areas other than those officially prescribed. If some SMC members do not have the capacity to inspect and interrogate the head teacher on the school's accounts, then such misapplication is likely to occur. One SMC member remarked:

We have been asked to do many things, but we don't understand many of the things and so we are not able to contribute much. It is only the chairman and the treasurer who do almost everything with the head teacher. Apart from the school inspections that we sometimes go with them, we don't do much but we must also be trained so that we can be involved (SMC member: 03/11/08).

Other SMC members in CBS and Kuku pointed out that when they have received training and sensitisation from the district office these had been useful, but such programmes were rarely organised, and that they expected the school to lead on this.

We have asked master (head teacher) to help us with more training so that we can also help the school better, but since the last training a year ago, there hasn't been any again. Some of the people too are new and they have never been trained. (SMC member [Kuku]: 04/11/08).

Following these issues raised by some SMC members, I talked to the two headteachers exploring their perspectives on similar issues. According to the headteacher of the Kuku School "many of those who are on the SMC are not literate, so their training could be difficult." He indicated that under the instruction of the MDE, the school had tried to hold workshops for them on two occasions but those among them who really needed the training failed to attend, and those who turned up did not stay for the duration. Besides, he argued that training of SMCs required funding which was not factored in the school's

budget and therefore could not be undertaken at school level, rather, it should be a responsibility of the district.

In the SPIP, there is no budget line for workshops for SMC members. The budget is always cut down so we don't have any for training. We don't even have enough for the main school activities. That is why the last two years the district education office came to our assistance but since then there hasn't been any financial support again (Head teacher [Kuku]: 24/10/08).

These statements illustrate the challenge that confronts rural school communities where the likelihood of illiterates on the SMC is high.

This lack of capacity among some SMC members has unearthed the potential for pseudo participation in the core business of the school that could undermine accountability and defeat the very purpose of community ownership and participation. In this respect, who serves on the SMC in particular is therefore important for its effective running and accountability, but in rural contexts, it appears, this may be difficult to achieve.

Considering the evidence available, policy expectation of some of the roles SMCs are expected to play seem to be based on assumptions that have not been tested particularly, in poor rural settings. Some of these require deep insights into schooling, skills in finance, administration, management and leadership, which in a rural setting, as the evidence indicate in this study, may not be available. This creates a potential for the few educated with some skills and others with influence to assume responsibility and thus defeat the policy expectations for greater representation and participation.

4.4 The Elite's Role in Schools

The 'elite' as used in this sense refer to people with influence in the community who are respected by both the community leadership and community members and whose views are consulted on matters of community interest and the school. These personalities may be retired educationalists; civil and public servants; the affluent and benevolent in the community. The inclination of these perceived elites in the community towards educational development appears to influence relationships between the school and community. Where there are problems between school and community – or even within the SMC or

PTA – such people are sometimes called upon to mediate. This group is included in the wider community (W.COM) in figure 3. In the view of the municipal director of education:

But for some of these people it would have been very difficult to resolve a lot of local conflicts. For example where there are problems between the community and the school sometimes we use them particularly, when some SMC members are themselves involved in such conflicts and because of their past accomplishments and respect the community has for them they listen to them (MDE: 11/10/08).

She added that:

We often cultivate the friendship of respected personalities (elites) because they are a very good resource for the school and to education in the municipality in many ways. Some of them are used as members of the MEPT and on the MEOC.

A community member added:

When there is a need that requires total community mobilisation and action particularly where funds are needed for school projects, a meeting is normally held at the town hall to garner community support. Those are the people who are made to speak at the gathering because majority of the people will listen to them than the SMC members who had become too familiar with the people (community member [Kuku]: 18/11/08).

A circuit supervisor supported this view with the following comment:

When issues come up and they are such that the involvement of the school and the education office may not resolve them, they are the people director (MDE) talks to, to help her resolve the problems. Both us (education authorities) and the community see them as the opinion leaders, whose voices and insights sometimes carry more weight than the SMCs and the PTAs (CS¹⁰: 11/10/08).

He added further that:

As a result, the school in particular always tries to get them 'on their side' since, they understand a lot of the issues affecting the school (CS: 11/10/08).

Community members put premium on the services of the elites who devote their time, energy and resources to support the school. Instances were given where out of their own free will, people offered their services as volunteer tutors in subjects in which teacher expertise was lacking.

¹⁰ CS stands for Circuit Supervisor

As one community member observed:

When there are no teachers for particular subjects especially at the JHS level some of the retired educationalists stand in as supply teachers. Some of them also help the examination class when they are about to write the BECE without demanding any money (community member [Kuku]: 19/11/08).

Considering the existing school governance structure, it may seem that the role the 'elite' play in educational affairs often happens through the 'back door' and officially goes unrecognised in school–community policy, and yet their ability to create conditions for active participation in school activities may actually surpass that of the formally institutionalised structures for community–school engagement.

However, while some saw their involvement as useful, some SMC members saw them as usurping their legitimate role as representatives of the community and thus diminishing their visibility and influence. Complaints of two members of the SMC's illustrate their displeasure of the attention given to these 'elites'.

They have taken over our work. When we need support to do our work, we don't get it but any support these people (local elite) need they get. The chief and elders and many community members give them more respect than us (SMC member [Kuku]: 04/11/08).

Another said:

What is the point in wasting our time on the school if everything we suggest has to be discussed with or approved by some of these opinion leaders? If they don't want us to do the job any more they should tell us so that we can leave for them to come and do the job (SMC member [Kuku]: 04/11/08).

Clearly, the activities of the elites have been perceived and interpreted differently. Whereas the school may have viewed their role as complementary, and from the community leadership perspective as supportive, it was viewed by the SMC as a source of conflict. Such a situation has the potential of weakening the relationship between stakeholders themselves, and more importantly, between the community and the school.

4.5 Parental Roles in Children's Schooling

School readiness of children and homework support, depended mainly on the value parents and families placed on education and how they felt their personal involvement

mattered in the academic development of their children. Thus, whereas, some parents felt the need to support their children's learning at home either by supervising directly or indirectly with the support of family members or others in the community, other parents did not feel they had a particular role to play.

This supports Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's (1997) theory that decisions and choices parents make are based on several constructs including their personal construction of parental role, i.e. what they believe they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education (see chapter 2 section 2.5). Hoover-Dempsey further indicated that parents support for children's education also depends on their sense of efficacy in helping their children to succeed in school, i.e. whether they believe in and are confident about their ability to be helpful to their children.

As indicated in the profiles of the two communities these are rural poor communities with majority of the population uneducated. Further, many of the young adults had moved to the cities to pursue various economic agendas leaving behind their children to be fostered by 'parents' who may not be in a position to support their children. This may explain the above disparity in parental responsibility.

Both communities (CBS and Kuku) reflected these attitudes. The following are some observations made:

Some parents are very serious about what their children do when they come home from school to the extent that during PTA meetings they raise queries as to why some teachers do not give homework regularly (teacher [CBS]: 25/11/08).

Probing further, a teacher from CBS pointed out that:

To some parents, homework is an indication that teachers are teaching. Some also are of the opinion that homework keep the children busy whilst at home and prevents them from having plenty of spare time to get involved in activities that could have negative influence on them (teacher: [CBS]: 25/11/08).

Parents who feel that they have a role to play in their children's education create opportunities for them at home. A parent indicated that:

I never went to school. If I was educated all the hardships I am going through would not be there. That is why even though I don't get much from this petty trading, I make sure that whatever I can do to support my children's schooling I do it (parent [Kuku]: 11/11/08).

Another parent pointed out that:

My son is very playful so my younger brother whom we stay with is the one who I have requested to make sure that if there is any homework from school he does it before he goes out to play with his friends (parent: [CBS]: 02/11/08).

Some teachers interviewed also observed that some children are not prepared well for school. A teacher from Kuku commented thus:

Many of the children don't eat before coming to school so when you are teaching you see them sleeping and looking weak and you can see that they are not learning. Sometimes during the morning break some of us (teachers) buy food for some of them (teacher [Kuku]: 22/10/08).

Other teachers in Kuku blamed the poor performance of pupils on parents' apathy towards their children's education. They added that some children – particularly boys – did not focus on their academic work, and showed more interest in fishing at the expense of schooling. As one teacher pointed out:

Because many of the boys go to the beach before coming to school, they arrive at school late. We expect parents to play their role as parents and ensure that their children attend school regularly and punctually (teacher [Kuku]: 23/10/08)

According to some teachers in Kuku, the fishing business at the beach was so lucrative that some boys only attended school two or three times a week and sometimes, only in the mornings. The teachers maintained that these things happened with the full knowledge of their parents and other members of the community, but nothing was done about it.

During the afternoon break, some boys leave the classroom for the beach to meet the canoes that dock in the afternoon, but they don't come back. The sad thing is that some parents and community members see them at the beach but they look on and sometimes work with them (teacher [Kuku]: 23/10/08). [See Photograph 2, p74]

Photograph 2: Children Working at the Beach during School Hours



Source: Author's Field Photos.

Another teacher added:

When we punish them for such behaviour some parents get angry and sometimes come to school to insult or assault us (teacher [Kuku]: 23/10/08).

In effect, some teachers expected that parents and community members would acknowledge the attitudes of children towards schooling as a contributory factor in their poor academic performance. Asked about the role of the SMC and PTA in educating community members about the effects of these attitudes, some teachers in the Kuku community responded that many parents do not attend such meetings. They pointed out that parents and community members had abdicated their parental and community responsibilities in failing to create conditions at home and in school that were conducive to supporting the educational development of their children. A teacher's observation was that:

When the children close from school and go home they play around in town and watch video games and films without any prompting from parents to them to learn or do their homework (teacher [Kuku]: 24/10/18).

Further investigation into the actual motivation for pupils' intransigence revealed that poverty and abdication of parental responsibility were factors that compelled children to take their future into their own hands. In a sense, these children were economically independent 'young adults' with business interests in the community. An MEOC member in the Kuku community argued that poverty was at the heart of this behaviour.

Because of poverty many of the school children took care of themselves by working at the beach or carry loads of foodstuffs or goods for some income. Such children in school cause a lot of problems for teachers. (MEOC member: 12/10/08)

However, the circuit supervisor had a different view. According to him:

Even though there is poverty in Kuku, the reason is not always poverty. Some parents are just irresponsible and rather spend a lot of money on funerals. (CS: 11/10/08).

The head teacher of Kuku reinforced the above point when he stated that:

Some parents don't know how their children come to school. Some of them just don't care, to the extent that even pupils terminal reports are not collected at the end of the term. Is this because of poverty? (head teacher [Kuku]: 24/10/08).

A parent however debunked the suggestion that they were not exercising the expected parental care for their children. She said:

There is not much that we can do in this town. Since my husband died all the responsibility has been on me. I get up early to catch the first car to the market in Bigtown where I sell foodstuffs. By the time I leave home my children will be asleep and I get back after 8:00 p.m., so I leave the children in the care of my younger sister. It is only on Sundays that I don't go to the market (parent [Kuku]: 11/11/08).

It is likely that parents in similar situations may not make time to be active in school affairs, leading to minimal or no interaction at all between such parents and the school. The Circuit

supervisor confirmed this and indicated that apart from this lack of individual engagement with the school, many of such parents do not also make it to the PTA meetings:

Many of the parents concentrate on their economic activities and are not involved in any way in the activities of the school. Even the once a term PTA general meeting they don't come but when decisions are taken by the executive and the few that attend meetings then they complain (CS: 11/10/08).

But some parents, who according to them, are regular at PTA meetings, gave a twist to this assertion of the CS and complained about the lack of transparency and democratic practices at meetings as the following comment by one of them suggests:

At meetings we are not given the opportunity to discuss a lot of things before arriving at decisions. The behaviour of the PTA chairman, his executive and the headmaster make people get the impression that decisions are made before we assemble for the meeting (parent: [CBS]: 02/11/08).

Another member who supported this view said:

They complain that we don't attend PTA meetings but if what we say will not be taken, why should we go? This is why many people have stopped attending meetings. They think it's a waste of time (parent [CBS]: 02/11/08).

In essence apart from some parents showing concern about whether teachers came to school and the performance of their children at the BECE, their own collaboration with the school to ensure that such expectation happened appeared not to have mattered much to them. Such attitude had the potential of widening the gap between parents and the school by their lack of patronage in school activities such as open days which could have given them the opportunity to interact with their children's teachers and inquire about their progress. As indicated earlier, such attitude in some cases went to the extent of some parents not considering it important to collect their children's terminal academic reports.

The complaints by some parents against PTA executives on the limitation of free expression, participation and representation point to similar sentiments expressed by some SMC members who complained about the concentration of power and authority in the hands of the chairman and the head teacher. In effect, the assumption that education decentralisation and community participation will allow representation, participation and

parental voice in the affairs of schools rarely occurred in the context of the Kuku community in particular.

4.6 Power and Conflict in Community – School Relations

The interview accounts with PTA and SMC members revealed just how issues of power in the relationships affect the various performances of functions. Some of these were reported to occur within the school governance bodies i.e. PTA/SMC and others between the community and the school. This section analyses views on the relationships and the tensions and conflicts that arise in community relations with schools.

The Kuku School PTA chairman who, according to some community members, was doing well in his private business was perceived to be using his wealth to influence officers in the education directorate, and using them as his backers whenever there were disagreements within the SMC on school discipline. One unhappy SMC member saw this as undermining their work.

We are all working together as a team in the interest of the school and the community but when we have situations where the PTA chairman sabotages the work of the committee by reporting matters to the education office, it is very discouraging (SMC member [Kuku]: 03/11/08).

According to him this led to tensions between members of the SMC and the PTA chairman. However, the Kuku PTA chairman, felt that his actions had been misconstrued and that some issues regarding the children's performance and sometimes the lack of educational materials required urgent intervention from the district directorate, arguing that the SMC had been slow in their response to problems faced by the school. As he pointed out:

Since the children are for us [sic], we sometimes feel that we must do some things urgently to solve some of the problems. But the SMC think that we have taken over their work (PTA chairman [Kuku]: 10/11/08).

I pursued this issue further and asked other PTA members if they were aware of this problem. Two of them argued that the SMC was usually slow in dealing with logistical needs of the school that needed urgent attention. Other PTA members argued that even though the PTA mobilised resources for the school, this was not acknowledged by the

SMC. This appeared to be the source of the conflict as pointed out by one PTA executive at Kuku:

We (PTA) levy ourselves and contribute when money is needed by the school but the SMC always give the impression that they raised the money as if we don't do anything. (PTA executive [Kuku]: 12/11/08).

Another source of tension was corporal punishment, this time between parents and teachers at both CBS and Kuku schools. Some parents interviewed were unhappy with actions taken by teachers who had punished children for arriving late to school. Even though none of the parents interviewed from the two communities said they were involved in parent-teacher confrontations, two teachers from the Kuku community who were victims of such community attacks responded as follows:

Our work as teachers does not involve teaching only. It also involves disciplining pupils when they go wrong but some parents don't take this kindly and come to school to assault us anytime some particular people are punished for consistently coming to school late or misbehaving in school (teacher [Kuku]: 22/10/08).

Such actions appeared to have strained the relationship between the school at Kuku and the community and made some teachers indifferent to how pupils behaved at school. A teacher's comment represents this position.

If they don't want us to discipline their children we'll leave them. As for us we are here; if they come to school we'll teach them; if they don't come to school, its their problem. Some of us will not waste our time to do extra classes for such people. Their parents should teach them themselves (teacher [Kuku]: 22/10/08).

The conflicts extended beyond the school community to the district education office where disagreements over implementation of education policies seemed to contribute to the conflicts. In one account a retired teacher and parent described a particular issue of conflict between parents and the district education authorities:

We (the parents) agreed with the school to pay a small levy to be given to the teachers to do extra classes for our children. The education office opposed it because they claimed that it was against government directive for schools to do extra classes for a fee. Sir, you know that our teachers are not paid well. So, we parents think that they must be helped with a small top-up so that they

will feel motivated to teach the children well. We do it all the same (parent [CBS]: 02/11/08).

Here, the issue was about a well intentioned policy directive which it seems the education authorities wished to enforce, and actions some parents felt were necessary to ensure improvements in children's performance, even if this flouted the policy.

However, in another example, a circuit supervisor recounted how the community's insistence on implementing to the letter, the ruling on fee-free education caused some parents to ignore levies imposed by the school. He said:

Many of the parents have resolved that so far as fees and levies have been banned, they will not pay any money to the school no matter the purpose (CS: 19/10/08).

It seemed contradictory, though, that on the one hand parents were willing to pay for extra classes for their children regardless of policy infringement, whilst on the other hand they insisted on complying with the ruling.

When asked regarding how such conflicts have been managed, the CBS head teacher saw this simply as a challenge requiring tact and negotiations rather than adherence to positions. He explained:

I have series of informal meetings with the SMC members and some of the PTA members here in the office. At times, I visit them in their homes and try to talk things out, for all of us to work in harmony (head teacher [CBS]: 24/11/08).

A retired educationalist at CBS and a member of the MEOC saw it as learning to manage relationships. He said:

Even though we all say it is for the sake of the children that we serve, each group has different interest and it is important for each group to try to understand the point of view of the other so that misunderstandings can be managed without hurting each other (MEOC member: 12/10/08).

Clearly, these views are indicative of a kind of conflict management which focused on compromise rather than applying policies by the letter. It also highlights the role that personnel and institutions outside the mainstream school governance structure played in

trying to resolve problems affecting relationships between the community and the school. It is an example of how within the community – school relations structure as depicted in the conceptual framework (section 2.5), district level management intervenes (sometimes using the elites in the community) to resolve conflicts either within the school governance bodies or between the school and community.

4.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have considered stakeholder groups' understanding of their roles and how they have been interpreted and executed; how communities participated in the governance of schools; and the challenges that emerged from such engagement. It was clear from the evidence that educational background, knowledge of how schools function and experience in governance impacted greatly on the manner stakeholders understood, interpreted and executed their functions.

Among the challenges that confronted stakeholder engagement with schools, lack of capacity featured prominently and seemed to have determined the extent of participation of both parents and community members in the affairs of schools. The next chapter examines some of the key factors that influence community participation in education.

Chapter 5: Factors and Conditions Shaping Community Participation in Education

5.0 Introduction

This chapter examines some of the key factors which influence the nature of community participation in education. An important factor is community aspirations for children. Another consideration can be termed the 'social contract' between the community and schools and how that determines the degree of participation. There is also the issue of 'space' that some community members believe should be created by schools to encourage engagement with the school community. Finally, there is an understanding that the whole community – school participation is dependent on the spirit of voluntarism, and that when this is threatened, the level of participation by community members drops. What also emerged was how some community members viewed the personal cost of participation. These factors and conditions seemed to shape how the interaction between the two (community and schools) played out in practice.

5.1 The Quality Imperative

The quality of education, that enhances academic progression of children, was repeatedly cited as an incentive for community interest in school governance issues. Community members who spoke about the value of education linked that to what they perceived to be the benefits and returns to the community from good quality education. As one community member pointed out:

In this town, we want to see our children, who are the future leaders, grow to become doctors, lawyers, engineers and accountants. We therefore see it as our duty to encourage them to go to school and learn hard to become responsible people in future (community member [CBS]: 08/12/08).

The view of other community members at both CBS and Kuku was that they chose fishing, farming or trading as vocations because they were not sufficiently literate in English to be employed by the government. Other community members contrasted the certainty of a salary at the end of each month that formal employment provided with their vocations which they said was seasonal, uncertain and which brought in irregular income. They

argued that they expected schools to provide their children with better opportunities than they had. As one community member noted:

I blame my parents for not taking me to school. We beg people to read and write our letters for us. We sleep in our bedrooms, but *our legs are outside* [our secrets are in the public domain; my emphasis] (community member [CBS]: 08/12/08).

These were some of the reasons given to explain their interest in their children's education and the expectation they had that schools would help fulfil them. A fishmonger outlined her plan for the future security of her child's education:

When I make sales, the first thing I do is to take part and put it aside by doing *susu*¹¹ for my two children's school needs before the money is used for something else. From this, I buy their uniforms and provide them with feeding money [sic] when school reopens (community member [CBS]: 09/12/08).

Thus, contrary to views held that people in rural communities may not value education (MOE, 2002), these comments suggested that education was considered a way out of an insecure life and a guarantee for improved livelihood. As one parent explained:

The way things are going on in this country if you don't have education you will be handicapped forever (Parent [CBS]: 03/11/08)

Another parent in Kuku explained that:

My parents never sent me to school but I see how some of the children of our elders are doing for them. They bring them money and clothing. When there is a funeral they bring them money for their donations. This is why I am doing my best to educate my two sons (parent [Kuku]: 12/11/08).

These views suggest the community's belief in education as being the key axis upon which the future life chances of their children turned and the high premium they placed on the value of education was what triggered their desire to establish a sound basis for their children's future.

¹¹ A savings scheme (similar to contributing to a credit union) often organised among market women, which allows them to withdraw a lump sum to invest in their businesses, or meet urgent personal or family needs.

One of several explanations given in answer to the question of what inspired parents to participate in their children's schooling was the school's performance in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE)¹². Over three quarters of the people that I interviewed identified this as a major factor influencing their level of interest in the schools' affairs and, particularly, their willingness to contribute financially to help their children make progress in school. Such interest appeared to have worked in favour of positive community – school relations and raised high expectations from some community members about what schools should be achieving. As one parent noted:

We send our children to school because we want them to pass and go to college¹³. So when the teachers help the children to achieve this we are happy and we also support them and get involved in their activities. Why should we waste money on them (children) if they will not go to college? (community leader/parent [Kuku]: 17/11/08).

A mother in Kuku who claimed that her daughter in JHS 2 (grade eight) could not speak or read English and had to rely on her nephew to read and interpret letters, blamed her teachers and gave this as the reason why she was unwilling to participate in PTA meetings. She explained:

For over a year, I have not attended any PTA meeting because the teachers are not helping the children. (parent [Kuku]: 11/11/08).

In another Instance, the allowances the SMC paid as motivation to teachers was discontinued because as some community members argued, teachers were “not teaching their children to pass examinations”. In support of their arguments, some community members referred to a retired head teacher of the school (Mr Abban), during whose tenure good BECE results had been achieved and how this had motivated community members to show more interest in the school. As pointed out by one community member:

Many parents and even some community members attended PTA meetings regularly, participated in many school activities and supported the school any time there was need (community member [Kuku]: 18/11/08).

¹² The BECE is the national examination taken by pupils at the end of their basic education (grade nine), and forms the basis for admission to senior high school.

¹³ College means Senior High School (SHS).

Another remarked that:

We never missed PTA meetings unless we were attending a funeral and we made sure that we attended many of the school's activities. (parent: 18/11/08).

In effect, these views convey the importance some community members attach to the school's performance as a pre-condition for engaging actively with schools.

From these comments, one can appreciate the readiness of community members to contrast Mr Abban's era with that of the current administration, which clearly signalled their expectations of the school and its teachers. It is also significant that in almost all the views expressed, community members linked their involvement in the affairs of the school with teachers' delivery of quality education to their children.

A PTA executive from the Kuku community made a similar point:

Collection of PTA dues has become very difficult these days because of the performance of the school at the BECE. Many of the parents who have more than one child in the school refuse to pay dues when the senior one does not do well at the BECE and get admission to secondary school (PTA executive [Kuku]: 12/12/08).

Often, it seems, this was used as leverage or the condition for helping schools to meet teacher needs as the comment below suggests:

I personally with some members called the head teacher and the teachers to talk to them and encourage them to do their best for the children. Two of them who complained about accommodation difficulties were helped to get accommodation so that they will not spend so much time looking for transport and be late to school. We did this to motivate them so that when exam result improves parents will also be motivated to pay their dues and help the school (SMC chairman [Kuku]: 03/11/08)

It demonstrates the importance attached to the provision of quality education interpreted in terms of good examination results, as driving interest and support for schools by community members. The opposite sentiment was that poor quality provision was a recipe for disengagement with schools. For those holding this view, if schools were not meeting their expected responsibility in terms of achieving good exam results, then, investing in

their children's education was not worth the effort, time and money, and certainly not worth the support schools expect from the community. One community member lamented, thus:

Many of the youth in this town finished the JSS but could not continue to Senior High School (SHS). They walk around town with no meaningful work for them to do and have become a burden on their parents (community member [Kuku]: 17/11/08).

He continued:

If this is the end of education then it's a waste of money. Those whose parents did not send them to school are either farming or fishing and they are making money (community member [Kuku]: 17/11/08).

The above views – and other reciprocal considerations, as the next section indicates – point to some of the major drivers of participation.

5.2 Community – School Relations: A 'Social Contract?'

In community – school relationship discourses, the impression has often times been given that the policy of education decentralisation is about what communities could do to support schools located within them. The fact of it being a two-way relationship is often not stressed much, thus diminishing the role the school plays or could play in the life of communities in which they are located.

Responding to a question about how schools and communities have engaged for their mutual benefit, a circuit supervisor (CS) pointed out that the community's involvement with schools depended on the extent to which teachers participated in community related activities. He further observed that when this occurred, there was greater appreciation of the school as a part of the community and a genuineness to support its development. In the circuit supervisor's view:

Head teachers have on many occasions used pupils to clean townships; clinics, weed compounds plant trees and provided the greatest support for communal labour. All this depend on the relationship between the head teacher and the leaders of the community (CS: 11/10/08).

A community member recounted instances in which a particular head teacher was the chief's secretary and another teacher was secretary to the town development committee.

This had created a cordial relationship which had led to teachers being welcomed and offered accommodation in the community. In his view:

When the teachers demonstrate that they are interested in the activities and welfare of community members by getting involved in community activities, such as festivals and communal labour and serving on development committees as secretaries or members, community members see them as part of them and this helps build a good relationship between the community and the teachers as well as the school (community member [CBS]: 10/12/08).

It is suggestive of a reciprocal relationship between community and school which starts with the school (teachers) engaging first, to nurture a feeling of mutual trust. This resulted in the communities providing support in the form of accommodation and provision of incentives (mostly in-kind donations) to teachers from community members and parents. As one community member pointed out:

As you are aware we have a proverb that the left hand bathes the right hand and the right hand bathes the left hand [which literary translates: *you help me; I help you*]. So once we see the teachers committed to our children, whatever we have to do to support them we will also play our part [*my emphasis*] (community member [CBS]: 09/12/08).

In the MDE's view:

The perception of the community of the school depends on the way the community sees the head teacher. When the head teacher participates in community activities the rest of the teachers are pulled along (MDE: 11/10/08).

Some teachers spoke about how service to the community had endeared them to parents and promoted positive relations as exemplified in this comment by a female teacher in the Kuku community.

For the last three years that I handled the church choir we have won three consecutive times the circuit singing competition. This is something both the church and the entire community are very proud of. For this reason many people in the community are very kind to me. A parent has even offered me her daughter to stay with. She says she wants her to be like me (teacher [Kuku]: 23/10/08).

However, there was also a view coming from some community members that participation depended on perceptions about whether teachers were doing a good job in providing quality education. In that respect some community respondents argued that they were not

willing to sacrifice their time for the school if the teachers were not teaching well enough for their children to pass the BECE.

In a situation where the teachers are not given attention to our children why should we also care about them? (community member [Kuku]: 18/11/08)

Other community members in Kuku held similar views. According to one of them:

Teachers here do not support the community as they should. They always demand incentives for every service they provide whether it is extra classes for the children or serving on a community development committee, but when they need anything they expect us to provide for them free of charge (community member [Kuku]: 17/11/08).

Whereas some community members thought the school didn't care much about the community by the way they handled their children and their involvement in community life, some teachers pointed out that such an assertion is misplaced. Some teachers in Kuku were of the opinion that the school did more than was probably expected of them. One teacher remarked "there is no activity in this town that the school is not involved in one way or the other". Another said:

But for the school, this community would be dead by now. It is the teachers and the pupils who are keeping this town going. Almost all the young men and women have left to work in the big towns. There isn't anything that goes on here that we are not involved in (teacher [Kuku]: 22/10/08).

However, other teachers in Kuku did not see community service as one of their responsibilities. As this teacher argued:

Our mandate is to teach. They always complain that we are not teaching the children. If we do community service is it not part of the teaching time we will be using? In any case many of us do not live in the community so I don't see it as an obligation. (teacher [Kuku] : 24/10/08).

On the contrary, the head teacher of the CBS School felt that community service should be viewed as part of the schools' social responsibility to the community. He alluded to the fact that the school's very existence depended on the community, and that teachers' should see their role as extending beyond the classroom.

...You see, look at this community, they are very poor but for them we would also not be here. Even though it is the image of the school that has made the

community popular the fact that the school is located here gives us an obligation towards them (head teacher [CBS]: 24/11/08).

This view was shared by other teachers in the same school. Some teachers in CBS admitted that their influence as teachers and control over their pupils were enhanced by their involvement in community activities, and that this helped to build a positive relationship with both children and parents. As this teacher in CBS explained:

Through home visits and interactions with parents, I get to know the children better and also their parents, and sometimes opportunities are created to counsel both the child and the parent (teacher [CBS]: 24/11/08).

These contrasting views seem to suggest that the role of teachers can be perceived differently. Whereas some saw it as inseparable from responsibility to the community, others viewed the two as distinct fields of activity that were mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, the examination of policy documents clearly shows that the school-community and teachers' role is carefully considered. The following is an extract from the policy, as published in the *Head teachers' Handbook*.

The school is part of the general organisation of a town or village. Whatever goes on at school affects the community. For example, when children pass well in an examination, everyone shares in their achievement. On the other hand, when the examination results of the school are poor, some people express their anger, sometimes by means of verbal attacks on the teachers. It is therefore important that you cooperate with the community, as the school will benefit a great deal if it has a good relationship with the people of the community.

The school could benefit the community through a number of activities, including the following:

- b) Once a term, select some institution or area in town that needs cleaning, and organise the pupils and teachers to undertake a clean-up at the place.*
- c) Identify places such as the community centre, the market and the chief's palace, that could benefit from tree-planting. In some cases, it may be necessary to plant flowers to beautify the surroundings.*
- d) Make sure your school assists the community in carrying out development projects.*
- e) The school should take active part in community programmes such as health week, immunization campaigns and the chief's enstoolment anniversaries.*

Source: Ghana Education Service, *Head teachers Handbook* (1994 p226)

Clearly, policy envisages spaces where schools and their local communities work together for the benefit of both the community and the school. However, none of the teachers' interviewed were aware of this policy. It demonstrates just how well-intended policies may sometimes not get beyond the pages of the document they are published in, so for those

who were providing community service, their actions were not in response to knowledge about this policy. This is the gap the study identified – the gap between policy rhetoric and the reality of people’s experiences as seen in the field.

The degree of participation appears to be shaped by a ‘social contract’ based on the principle of mutual expectation of execution and accountability of respective roles between the community and schools. The reciprocity of this relationship thus forms the framework for engagement between school and community.

5.3 Space for Decision – Making

Evidence from the study suggests that community – school relationship is further enhanced when schools take the initiative to create space for community members to become actively involved in the affairs of the school beyond simply providing and sharing information about the school.

For example, some community respondents at Kuku expressed the view that the more open the school is, in allowing the community – through the SMC – to *get involved* in the governance of the school (as prescribed in its guidelines) the more willing the community will be to engage. A community member pointed out that:

If they open their doors to us and share their problems with us, we will be happy to get involved, but sometimes their behaviour show that they don’t want us to be involved in matters inside the school (community member [Kuku]: 18/10/08)

Others, however, felt that often schools gave the impression that they were only interested in the support they received from the community in respect of school infrastructure and teachers’ welfare issues. Beyond this, it did not appear that the schools were interested in the community being part of the decision-making processes of the school as this comment by an SMC member from CBS indicates:

When it is about fundraising then they make sure that all of us are aware so that we can inform community members or parents and convince them to pay. That one even if you don’t attend meetings they will find you, but when the money is to be spent it is only the chairman and the head teacher who take the decisions (community member [CBS]: 10/12/08).

Similarly, a statement from a Kuku PTA member supported this view:

When they need something, then they see our importance, other than that, they don't mind us (PTA member [CBS]: 12/11/08).

Other PTA members at Kuku were also displeased about the fact that they were acknowledged only when it came to the needs of the school.

We have become like a bank to them. When they need something, then they come to us. During long vacations when they want to organise vacation classes, then they lobby the PTA executives for levies to be paid by the membership (PTA member [Kuku]: 04/11/08).

These statements suggest that both the community members and parents at both study sites wanted more say in decisions that affected the school. Some comments sometimes suggested that the problem was about knowing clearly the boundaries of participation as the following statement indicate:

We are sometimes at a loss as to what we should get involved in and what we are not permitted to get involved in. Many of the decisions about the school are taken without us making any contribution. The SMC and the PTA Chairman will just tell us that the school has decided to do this and that and most times where we get to know, then it's about money (community member [Kuku] : 18/10/08).

Some SMC members in both CBS and Kuku felt that as representatives of the community their own involvement in decision-making was limited and felt that often times decisions about the school was taken without their input. As one SMC member from Kuku opined:

Sometimes, we don't know how decisions are made. Even when we have not attended any meetings, you hear later that that the SMC had decided to do this and that. Some people in town who are not members of the SMC are listened to more than some of us who are members (SMC member [Kuku]: 04/11/08).

Another member attempted to offer an explanation why some were being sidelined:

Because we are not educated, the chairman and the head teacher do everything together. They don't think we have anything to contribute so most of the times they listen to some powerful people in town. This is why some of

us even don't attend meetings regularly, so we leave everything to them
(SMC member [Kuku]: 15/10/08)

However, some teachers held a different view on this issue, arguing that by dealing with some membership of the SMC, PTA, MEPT and MEOC, the community was offered the opportunity to be involved from the planning stage of school programmes, such as, the SPIPs from the beginning to its execution stage. A teacher from Kuku made this point:

Every year, before the SPIP is sent to the district education office a meeting is held by all stakeholders to discuss the school plans but only few people join the SMC and PTA chairmen and the staff of the school to draw the plans
(teacher [Kuku]: 22/10/08)

According to the regulations, before funds are spent, it had to be approved by the chairman of the SMC and signed by the head teacher and the CS. The SMC chairman has to sign the request form (form B) as evidence of approval. This was evident in about five cases I examined, one of which is shown in figure 4 below. The SMC chairman's signature by implication indicates approval by the community's representative. Nevertheless, as one SMC member in the Kuku community noted, sometimes decisions were taken by the SMC chairman and the head teacher which created the impression of the SMC toeing the school line rather than representing the community's contribution to the decision - making process. One SMC member complained thus:

They discussed the budget without us. When we asked them (the school) why they did not call us, they told us it was our chairman's responsibility to invite us and not them (school). So the chairman meets with them alone
(SMC member [Kuku]: 03/11/08).

Figure: 4 Request form for (SPIP) activities signed by the head teacher, SMC Chairman and the Circuit Supervisor.

Form B

SCHOOL CAPITATION GRANTS REQUEST FORM

Name of School: Edumadze D/A JSS

Based on the School Performance Improvement Plan, I/we request for the release of funds for the performance of the following activity/(ies):

Activity: Partitioning of a class, Support to needy students, Provision of Welfare Services, Learning materials, Sports Activities, Fees to D.E.O. etc.

Amount: \$3,505,000 (Three million five hundred and five thousand cedis)

Name: J. F. Mensah

Signature: [Signature]

Approval:

Headteacher: J. F. MENSAN [Signature]

SMC Chairman: SADIQUE BAFFOE [Signature]
C/S T. K. Quainoo (TK Quainoo)

Approved
[Signature]
11/1/08

Source: author's field study

However, at the CBS community, some SMC members indicated that before the SPIP is prepared a seminar is organised for all stakeholders to explain the objectives and focus of the plan. Such meetings were usually facilitated by the MEPT and the CS. Confirming this, the SMC chairman for the CBS said:

We give everybody; I mean all stakeholders, a chance to know how the budget was used and what we want to do next year. People have the opportunity to make suggestions and those that are good are added to the plan, so everybody is involved (SMC chairman [CBS]: 27/11/08).

It appears that the different views on the degree of participation are an indication of the different perceptions and interpretation of what participation meant to them individually and as groups. While SMCs, PTAs and community members appeared to have looked forward to general invitations and mass participation in school activities, school authorities felt that representations by such interest groups addressed the issue of participation and voice. However, this certainly was not the view of some members of the community.

Some community members in Kuku said they provided services such as teaching carpentry, culture and vocational skills, but indicated that those were private arrangements between themselves and the school as this community member indicated:

I have an arrangement with the school to teach carpentry every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. At the end of every month they pay me an allowance (Community member [Kuku]: 19/11/08).

What it appears to be the issue is that some community contributions to school improvement were not channelled either through the SMC or PTA, thus portraying the stance that once such opportunities for participation were not sanctioned by them, they appeared not to have recognised such activities as opportunities for community members' involvement. Again, this highlights the fact that schools and communities were not in exact agreement as to their relative contributions, further nurturing mistrust and narrowing the spaces for collaboration between the schools and their communities.

5.4 The Personal Cost of Participation

Decentralisation of education management is usually premised on the assumption that communities would demonstrate interest and actively participate in the affairs of their schools (Olowu & Wunsch 1990; Putnam 1993; World Bank 1994). Secondly, that through such participation, communities would develop a sense of ownership for their schools and provide voluntary services to support them. However, not much is often said about the cost of such participation. I was interested in exploring the extent to which this was played out in the school communities I studied, and the factors which affected this sense of ownership. The data showed quite strongly that ownership and participation came with a cost that determined how people were willing to volunteer their services to support school improvement.

Talking to the head teacher and staff of both CBS and Kuku schools, it emerged that community participation for example, through the provision of labour on school projects such as the classroom block constructed at CBS and a KVIP toilet block at Kuku was on the decline. The head teacher of CBS community (located near a commercial area (Bigtown)) observed that:

In the past matters affecting the school received spontaneous responses from community members. The primary school block was built with all hands on deck but when constructing the new JSS classroom block few

community members came to offer communal labour. (head teacher [CBS]: 24/11/08).

The head teacher at the Kuku School presented a similar story when he said:

Many community members these days prefer going to their farms or go fishing to doing voluntary work. (head teacher [Kuku]: 24/10/08)

It appeared from further probing of this issue that community members who were willing to volunteer their services expected rewards, whereas it was assumed they would offer services for “free”. Some SMC members expected to be remunerated for their work on the committee. The main argument was that the opportunity cost of working on school programmes meant a substantial economic sacrifice, since according to some of them, they could have spent some of that time on their farms, fishing or trading as these views suggest:

... Why not? I know it is our duty as members of the SMC to be visiting the school to check on their condition and progress. But if we spend our time in the affairs of the school, where do we get the money to pay school fees and even feed our families? (SMC member [Kuku]: 04/11/08).

Another SMC member from CBS who expressed similar sentiments indicated that:

We have complained to the SMC chairman to change meeting days from week days to week-ends because during the week we attend to our businesses. That is why attendance to meetings is very poor, not that people are not interested in helping the school (SMC chairman [CBS]: 27/11/08).

There was also a suggestion that economic hardship was contributing to this lack of voluntary commitment to offer services for school development, especially community members’ support of newly posted teachers. A community member in Kuku who was a retired educationalist pointed out that he had noticed a decline in offer of assistance to teachers who had taken up teaching posts in the community. As he pointed out:

It used to be a common feature for graduating teachers to scramble for postings to the rural areas. This drive was motivated by gifts of foodstuffs and vegetables. But these gifts have stopped coming these days. So as you can see, the rural areas are no longer attractive to new teachers. (community member [Kuku]: 19/11/08)

He continued:

... The poverty that has descended on this village has made everybody stingy.
(community member [Kuku]: 19/11/08).

According to the Kuku head teacher, literate people who were elected or appointed to represent their various constituencies withdrew when they realised that there was more demand on their time than they had anticipated. What was rather revealing about this problem was the solution that some offered to increase their levels of participation from the community. Basically, there was a feeling that if an allowance was paid for serving on school committees or visiting schools to inspect their progress, then more people would be willing to serve on them. The head teacher further indicated that:

Even community members of the SMC are now asking for allowances for working as SMC members and attending meetings and because no provision to pay such allowances has been made in our budget they don't attend meetings (head teacher [Kuku]: 24/10/08).

A community member's comment confirmed the head teacher's assertion:

If they don't pay us some allowances very soon they (school) will not get anyone to serve on any committee. I don't understand why when teachers do extra classes they are paid and when we spend our time on the school they don't want to give us anything (community member [Kuku]: 19/11/08).

Probing further, these views appeared to have gained some legitimacy in those who held them because of the introduction of capitation grants¹⁴ to schools. The view was that the government's willingness to absolve the burden of parents because of 'prevailing economic hardships' by introducing the capitation grant should be extended to those who were also helping the school since all of them were in the same economic environments. That failing, they felt inclined to concentrate on their vocations. One SMC member from the CBS community argued:

If the government was ready to pay a capitation grant, it should also pay for services rendered by us. After all we all go to the same market (SMC member [CBS] : 27/11/08).

Quite clearly, the capitation grant policy appeared to have resulted in some unintentional consequences. Its introduction had created the impression that the government was going to cater for almost all services related to schools' development, which obviously is counter

¹⁴ Grant to schools based on enrolment in each school

to decentralisation philosophy. This had been interpreted by some to imply that there was little need for community members to make any contribution to school development, including support for school governance.

The assumption that communities will voluntarily engage with schools discounts the competition with other social and economic pressures. Where communities feel under stress from economic hardships this might dampen their interest in active engagement with schools. It raises the question about what is reasonable to expect from communities and especially of the wider education community.

However, parents with children in private schools spoke differently about their relationship with schools expressing more willingness to respond to requests to school improvement. Three of such parents (one in Kuku and two in CBS) who had enrolled their children in low-cost private schools were of the opinion that private providers offered value for money, hence their willingness to make sacrifices to assist when called upon by their schools.

In a private school the reason for sending our children to school is achieved. We spend money now and hope that our children will make progress academically. In the government's schools the teachers are not committed like the private school teachers (parent [Kuku]: 11/11/08).

Ownership and voluntary service are the hallmarks of community participation in education. However in poor rural communities this may come at a cost to residents who look to their service merely as a voluntary activity, but as an investment of their time. Clearly the introduction of the capitation grant had added to the distortion about participation as a voluntary service, with some thinking they should benefit from this grant.

This is a case of unintended consequences of policy and draws attention to the need to look at the wider implications of new policies before perhaps making adjustment or taking appropriate steps to limit any negative consequences. Clearly the evidence from the study shows that participation may be misconstrued or misapplied in the face of other policies, e.g. the capitation grant.

5.5 The Challenge of Foster Parenting and Participation

Life in indigenous or rural communities is woven around the concept of the extended family and communal living, together with the attendant feature of shared responsibility (Addae-Boahene & Akorful, 1999). Communities believe that raising a child – among other duties – is the responsibility of the entire community (ibid.). An influential church leader reinforced this view, by declaring that, “We live together as one big household; we are all responsible for the welfare of each other” (clergyman: 19/11/08).

This suggests that traditional setting and the family group influence the way in which the involvement of parents or guardians occurs. It is this cultural influence that seems to shape the shared responsibility towards members of the extended family, especially children.

Evidence from the fieldwork portrays a scenario which in both study sites, young and educated parents are increasingly migrating to the cities for socio-economic reasons, leaving grandparents and other relatives to care or foster their children. There appears to be a view that where real parents have left the community and grandparents and other relatives are in charge of children one could not expect the same level of interest and commitment as one would if the actual parents were there. One of such foster parents indicated:

My son has gone to Kumasi¹⁵ to work there. He has to take care of us here. So, we also take care of our grandchildren for him so that he can work in the city and get money to take care of us (foster parent: 17/11/08).

This was a common answer to the question; why many children were being fostered by relatives other than their biological parents. This phenomenon is important because often, grandparents and distant relatives may not have the same degree of commitment and knowledge of the child’s welfare in school and therefore, participate less in school affairs as these two comments seem to suggest:

Many of the young parents who could have been active in both their children’s education and in the activities of the school have all gone to the big cities to work since there is no major economic activity in this town but

¹⁵ Kumasi is the second largest city in Ghana after Accra.

unfortunately, many of the foster parents are not able to participate in the schools activities because of their age (CS: 19/10/08).

A teacher at Kuku added:

Some misbehaviour requires the invitation to the school depending on the gravity of the offence. We would usually call the parents of such pupils here, but with these foster parents, many of whom are grandparents, we rather have to go to them (teacher [Kuku]: 23/10/08).

He further added that:

Many times they (foster parents) rather report some of the bad behaviours of their wards to us to discipline them. Maybe it would be different if the real parents are here (head teacher: 23/10/08).

Another observation was that the illiteracy of foster parents and guardians made it difficult for them to engage closely with schools. Questioned about what went on in school, such parents showed very little knowledge of what they did or whether their wards derived any benefit from going to school. For instance, a grandparent, a food vendor plying his trade just a few metres from the school, told me:

Opaynin [big man], I've never sat on a school bench before. How can I understand what goes on in the school? For me, I do whatever the head teacher and teachers ask me to do for my grandson. If I go to the school now and I am asked anything in English, can I respond? (foster parent [Kuku]: 18/11/08).

However, it does appear from what one teacher in CBS said about the school's frustrations, that they always had to pursue these guardians with constant reminders about matters that required parental attention and attendance to meetings. In the teacher's view, these reminders meant very little to them, especially if they were illiterate.

When there is going to be a school event such as, open days, we send messages through the pupils to their parents/guardians long before the event so that they would participate, but all these attempts to get them here do not yield any fruits because they don't come (teacher [CBS]: 26/11/08).

Another challenge was the ailing physical health of many foster/grandparents, which became a debilitating factor in their endeavours to play an active role in the education of their grandchildren. Most of the time, their concern was to take care of their own health,

which they obviously ranked above the schooling of their wards. One of such foster parent to a question on how she participates in the life of the school and the academic work of her ward said:

Muwra (Bigman), you can see for yourself that I can't walk without this walking stick. When I walk for a long distance my legs get swollen, so I don't go anywhere. I only walk around this compound to exercise my legs (foster parent [CBS]: 08/12/08)

Similarly, the interest and priorities of other foster parents or guardians were mostly geared towards stabilising their personal socio-economic circumstances, rather than pursuing the educational interests of the children in their care as this comment suggests:

Sometimes remittances from his father delay in coming so it is what I get from the sale of my petty trading that I use to support all of us till I hear from them. I don't have any adult in the house so if I leave and attend school activities there is nobody to sell for me (foster parent: [CBS]: 02/11/08).

The point here is that survival needs appear to make it difficult for guardians to find as much time as parents to interact with the school. In effect, the differing interests of parents and guardians, coupled with their respective educational backgrounds, seem to influence attitudes to participation in the schooling of wards.

Clearly noticeable was the fact that most of these foster parents were women (grandmothers and aunties) who traditionally have major domestic responsibilities to the family. Adding fostering then became an additional challenge. A member of the SMC noted:

Our women are traditionally busy people; they go to farm or sell in the market, keep the house and take care of the entire family, particularly, children. As you know in our community child care is a woman's responsibility (SMC [Kuku]: 04/11/08).

A community member also pointed out that:

Even though men can help sometimes, matters about children are better handled by women, so when the real mothers are not around it creates a vacuum especially when some of these grown up women have to take up the educational aspects of the children beyond their domestic care.

From the municipal director of education's perspective:

Traditionally, men are supposed to provide care for their family even though many women these days help in contributing to the family income. So it is expected that in this situation the men will also share in the responsibilities for the children, particularly their schooling since most the women are busy and also uneducated, but the men don't (MDE: 11/10/08).

These comments give indication of a situation that seems impossible for foster parents (in this context, mainly women) to relate with schools as active participants. Even though this study did not consider the gender dimensions of community participation in education, such a perception of community members on women's role may be worth investigating in the future.

5.6 Summary

Drivers of participation have been discussed in this chapter. Key among them was communities' expectations from the school to deliver quality education, defined in terms of results of the BECE and academic progression. Community members and parents also expressed the view that offering space per se does not give them voice unless they are given the opportunity to be part of the decision-making processes on matters affecting schools.

The incidence of poverty and its impact on voluntary service pointed to the fact that there is a cost to participation which should not be taken for granted, particularly in poor rural contexts. In the next chapter, the importance of accountability and leadership in enhancing community – school relations is examined.

Chapter 6: The Importance of Accountability and Leadership in Enhancing Community – School Relations

6.0 Introduction

In the conceptual framework I signalled that accountability and leadership could play a very fundamental role in determining the state of participation between the various actors in community – school relations. This chapter examines the role accountability and leadership played in addressing the expectations of both the community and the school.

6.1 Accountability

This section highlights how accountability or the lack of it is manifested in the management of schools and how it enhances or limits the expectations of parents, the community and the school. The first section examines what seemed to be poor teacher attitudes at the Kuku School, how parents reacted to this and how community members and the head teacher managed these attitudes. The second section examines how accountability systems were applied at the CBS school/community, resulting in meeting the expectations of parents, community and the school in terms of good examination results, a situation that seems to dispel the impression that the notion of state school failure is universal.

6.1.1 The Effects of Poor Teacher Accountability

More than half of the teachers at Kuku stayed outside the community and had to commute from towns nearby to school. Vehicles plying other towns to Kuku are few, making it important for users to pay particular attention to travel times. This seemed to have affected teacher attendance to school as pointed out by a community member – “Many of the teachers don’t live here in town so some of them are late to school most of the times”. Seeing this as problematic, some community members expressed concern about absentee teachers and went on to monitor teacher attendance by visiting schools or inquiring from their children whether their teachers were in school or not. As one community youth pointed out:

Some of us in the youth development association decided to go to the school premises to look around during the morning break to find for ourselves which teachers came to school (community member: [Kuku]: 17/11/08).

Others noted that the issue of absenteeism and tardiness had created tensions between the school and some community members who felt that their children's future was being jeopardised. As one community member pointed out:

They have been posted here to teach but they do not show interest in the children in this town. Many of them don't even come to school regularly and when they come they are late but they close very early (community member [Kuku]: 17/11/08).

A petty trader at Kuku who is also a parent and sells at the entrance of the school said:

I didn't go to school but I can read the watch, so every day I look at the time they (teachers) pass and I mark. I do the same thing for those who leave to go home early before closing (parent [Kuku]: 11/12/08).

Where teacher absenteeism persisted, it was sometimes said that some parents were more likely to encourage their children to support them in their business ventures. One community member said:

On many occasions, the teachers don't come to school, particularly on Fridays and Mondays, and because the children have studied this pattern, some of them also don't go to school (parent [Kuku]: 11/12/08).

A parent concurred with this view;

During market days on Mondays knowing that my daughter's teacher does not come on Mondays, I go with her to the market to help me (parent: 12/12/08).

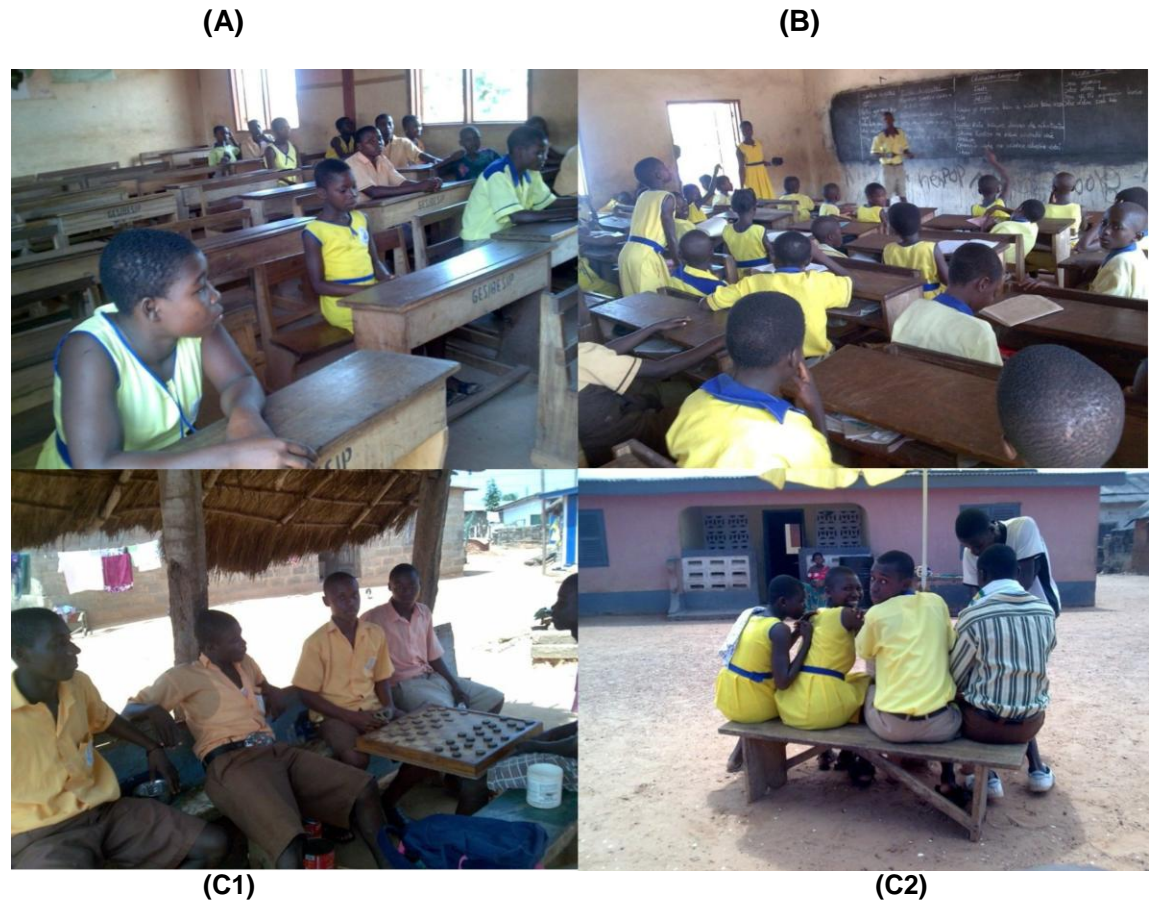
A community member's worry was how teachers absences allowed children to roam about in town, with the potential of them being exposed to dangers of gambling and betting and the girls particularly, being abused in town. She said:

Even though some of them collect their pocket money and leave home as if they were going to school, they don't stay in school but roam in town and engage in activities like playing games and going to video centres among others. (community member: 18/11/08).

Photograph 3 below, shows some evidence of these acts which was captured during my field work, where as result of teacher absenteeism some classrooms are half empty (A);

some pupils taking over classes as teachers (B) and pupils playing truant in town (C1 & C2).

Photograph 3: Effects of Teacher Absenteeism



Source: Author's Field Photos.

Comments by some parents in Kuku suggest that they expected the school to exercise some duty of care over their children as long as they were in school, thus implying that the onus of ensuring that the children were secure and cared for was on the teachers, as this parent opined:

Once we sent our children to school we put our trust in their teachers that they will care for them. Since the head teacher and some of them are also parents with children we expect them to care for our children like their own children (parent: 11/12/08).

Another community member said:

We don't understand what the head teacher is doing. He is supposed to control them but he leaves them to do what they want. This is why many people take their children to the private school. There, this will not happen (community member: 17/11/08).

In a sense, the community was questioning the commitment of the school in meeting the goals and aspirations for their children. As a result some parents and community members saw the opportunities that private schools offered as more attractive.

Probing further into what community members and parents through the SMC and the PTA had done to solve this problem, the SMC chairman explained that they approached the problem with caution in order not to make any move that would trigger the departure of teachers from the school, such as, qualified teachers asking to be transferred to other towns. The SMC chairman responded thus:

We know that what they (teachers) are doing is not good, but last year when we reported a teacher to the MDE for persistent absenteeism he got angry and threatened to leave the school and he left. Even before he left he wasn't coming to school anymore (SMC chairman: 03/11/08).

However, a few of the youth in town I interviewed thought otherwise. According to them, in one instance they had by-passed the SMC and PTA, and sent a petition to the MDE reporting the behaviour of teachers in the school. They felt that both the SMC and the PTA had not taken the matter of teacher absenteeism seriously because as one of them argued:

The SMC and PTA chairmen are very close to the head teacher so they don't want to take any action. (community (youth) member: 19/11/08).

When I enquired about this issue as to what disciplinary action he had taken, the head teacher who seemed to empathise with the situation, counteracted with this response:

There hasn't been any official warning because the teachers are working in very difficult circumstances. Some of them walk longer distances before they

come to school if they miss the lorry. That is why most of them are late to school (head teacher: 24/10/08)

Clearly, this was an attempt to explain the difficult circumstances that his teachers were confronted with, thus, in a way justifying their behaviour. The head teacher cited the education directorate as contributing to the problems of the teachers and the school mentioning the administrative lapses in the processing and payment of salaries, especially those of newly trained teachers, some of whom had not been paid for over a year as issues that made holding teachers accountable in respect of attendance difficult. He recounted how teachers have had to borrow money for their upkeep and fares for commuting to school. He complained about the inadequate staffing situation in the school, which had resulted in higher workloads for teachers. He pointed out that:

I agree that teacher absenteeism is a problem but some of the teachers have not been paid for over a year now. How do you enforce discipline when you know where the problem is coming from? (Head teacher [Kuku]: 24/10/08).

He added:

The problem gets worse when you consider the fact that we have teacher shortages so at times some of them are asked to handle additional classes and cover for others who may be absent from school so if I don't handle these teachers well and they leave the situation will be worse than we see it now (Head teacher [Kuku]: 24/10/08).

On the effort the SMC and the PTA were doing to resolve this phenomenon the head teacher indicated that an attempt by the SMC and PTA to provide allowances for unpaid teachers initially could not be sustained. Moreover, efforts to revive the scheme had been met with opposition from parents due to the strained relationship triggered the perception that they were not getting their due from the teachers.

Clearly, in Kuku, the difficulty in holding teachers accountable was down to what appears to be the poor conditions of service and administrative bottlenecks by the education authorities which had compromised the head teacher's, the SMC and PTA's ability to take appropriate action. This was a problem, it seems, not appreciated by some community members and parents.

6.1.2 How Accountability Makes a Difference in Community – School Relations

At CBS, the story about teacher attitudes was different. There was a feeling that teachers did their best and went the extra mile, for example, supporting students preparing for the BECE examinations, as this comment seem to suggest:

Teachers in CBS School do very well. They always try to maintain the standard. For this reason when it is time for examination they give special attention to the examination class after normal school hours. That is why our children always do well (parent: 03/11/08).

A PTA executive member pointed out that:

In this school when a teacher is to absent for more than a week for one reason or the other, the PTA and the SMC are informed and the head teacher makes an arrangement for another teacher to take over the class (PTA executive [CBS]: 02/11/08).

He added:

In the same way when a pupil absents himself or herself from school for more than a week without any explanation the parents are called by the school to meet the class teacher and the head teacher (PTA executive [CBS]: 02/11/08).

I was intrigued as to why and how one public school was able to cultivate the interest of stakeholders and seem organised in a way that facilitates good community – school relationship, while the other (Kuku), had been less successful. Was it an effective SMC and PTA; availability of resources; accountability or leadership?

The following findings provide some answers. According to the chairman of the SMC when the school was established, a high sense of accountability was built into its ethos, as this was seen as the basis for academic excellence. He explained:

The foundations for such an aspiration were laid by the inaugural head teacher, who ensured that each member of his staff did what was expected of him or her, whilst he provided the necessary leadership. Subsequent heads had continued to build on this foundation ever since (SMC chairman: 27/11/08).

Similarly an MEOC member had this to add:

Any teacher who is not serious with his work, the SMC will not allow him to last here. The teachers are aware of this so they don't joke with their job. In this school if a teacher is absent then either he is sick or there is a district activity or a workshop he is attending. (MEOC member: 12/10/08).

This was corroborated by one of the teachers of the school:

In this school when you are absent for any reason you have to write formally to explain and this is put on your file. If it becomes too much 'Master' (head teacher) will warn you and when it persists then he will report you to the SMC who will ask for your transfer from the education office (teacher: 26/11/08).

Through the PTA and SMC, the school had also instituted a system that rewarded achievement. For example, when the BECE results were released in 2008 and the school had done very well, the teachers were given cash rewards, especially those responsible for subjects in which pupils had achieved excellent grades. On the other hand, teachers of subjects in which pupils had performed poorly were queried as evidenced in some SMC and PTA documents I examined.

According to the Chairman of the SMC, the accountability processes the school has established regarding teacher performance is what had contributed greatly to the 'positive' state of affairs in the school. He indicated:

The teachers are aware of the implications of their actions so as long as they remain in this school they remain focused. Besides, almost all of them have their own children in the school so they have additional interest and have to work hard (SMC chairman: 27/11/08).

On staffing, the head teacher indicated that:

We don't always have the total number we need for the school but the shortages are supported with untrained or pupil teachers, but because they are not formal employees of the GES, they are paid by the PTA until the appointment of some of them is approved by the director (head teacher [CBS]: 26/11/08).

One PTA member pointed out that:

It is the dedication of the head teacher and the teachers and the academic performance of the children that motivate us to be active in PTA and school activities (PTA member: 02/11/08).

However, accountability was not only demanded from the school; the school in turn demanded parental accountability. A teacher hinted that:

Whenever there was going to be a PTA meeting, the children will be informed to remind their parents. We also put up a notice and the agenda on a board displayed conspicuously so that those who bring their children to school will see (teacher: 24/11/08).

A parent indicated that “even those who were traders attended meetings before leaving for the market”. Asked why, she replied:

Here, (this school), if you don't attend, you will pay a fine and if you don't pay, your child will be sacked [sic] from school, so the children themselves will worry you to come (parent: 02/11/08).

Another parent said:

In this school they are particular about punctuality. When your child is consistently late the parent is invited to the school and warned. Even though no one had been dismissed before, we all try and comply with the regulations (parent: 02/11/08).

These comments seem to suggest how the enforcement of accountability systems oblige the various actors not only to fulfil their side of the bargain but shapes the environment for community school engagement.

Whilst following up to validate my interview transcripts, I had information about a stakeholders' meeting scheduled at the CBS community on June 9, 2009, (about 6 months after the initial fieldwork) and I took the opportunity to attend. I observed from a distance to have a feel of what the meeting was about.

The agenda centred on academic performance, discipline of pupils, parental responsibility, the community's role in checking child delinquency, fund raising for the purchase of library

books and sports equipment, and presentation of awards to deserving teachers for dedicated service.

Photograph 4: Community/Stakeholder Meeting at CBS



Source: Author's Field Photos.

The photograph above shows the June 9 stakeholders' meeting organised at the CBS community where the chief and elders of the town, the municipal chief executive, the education committee of the municipal assembly, the education directorate, community members and school children were all in attendance.

Even though the above photograph depicts a sense that stakeholders in the education enterprise realise the need to collaborate for school improvement, the significance of the event was not so much about holding the meeting itself; rather, it was the establishment of an accountability system that allows stakeholders to come together from time to time, discuss the welfare of the school and give account of their stewardship.

I used the opportunity to interview the head teacher, a teacher, a community member, a parent and two Junior High School (JHS) 3 students. Key insights from these multiple views were that:

- For accountability to thrive, each stakeholder (parents, community members and the school) should be willing to fulfil the various roles expected of them.
- There must be transparency, responsiveness and answerability to maintain the confidence between parents, the community and the school.
- Stakeholders meeting should be held two times a year since they serve as a learning and feedback mechanism for all concerned with education.
- It creates the awareness that stakeholders are interested in what goes on and are watching.

One of the teachers said:

I am always conscious of the fact that I will have to answer for my stewardship for either a good work, when my students pass well in their exams or a bad work, when they don't do well. This guides me in the way I work (teacher [CBS]: 25/11/08).

The head teacher of the CBS School explained:

When all stakeholders meet like this, I am always very happy because from the questions some parents and community members ask, my teachers realise that I am not strict for its sake, because they realise that stakeholders demand high standards from the school (head teacher [CBS]: 24/11/08).

Asked why he thought such standards are demanded, he answered, "because whatever we need they provide". When asked about how such interaction enhanced the relationship between the school and the various stakeholders, a parent said:

Anytime we have such a meeting it reminds us of our responsibilities as parents to our children and what we have to do to help them and also what the school wants us to do (parent: 09/06/09).

The account seems to suggest that accountability does make a difference, and influences teacher behaviour, parents and indeed, that of community members as well. It

demonstrates how good performance could be rewarded to encourage greater performance, sensitivity to the expectations of parents and the community, and cooperation between the community and the school. However the lack of it (for whatever reason), as evidenced in Kuku, compromise the relationship. But the lack of accountability may also be linked to poor working conditions and administrative bottlenecks for which those supposed to hold people accountable may have little or no control, as the Kuku case illustrates.

6.2 Leadership

In considering opinion on what influences the relationship between school and community, one determinant that almost all stakeholders alluded to was the issue of leadership at both school and community levels. Views suggested that school management leadership style (i.e. leadership by the head teacher) is a key factor, and it is considered as largely contributing to shaping the relationship between the community and the school. In effect, the school is seen through the lens of community perception of the head teacher.

6.2.1 School Leadership

Comments by the Municipal Chief Executive (MCE), Municipal Director of Education (MDE), a Municipal Education Planning Team (MEPT) member and a Circuit Supervisor (CS) seem to support the assertion that the leadership styles of head teachers and the nature of experiences they have acquired over the years help shape the relationship between the school and the community. The MDE pointed out that:

My interactions with them (head teachers) indicate that their experiences in previous schools and communities they had worked in as well as the experiences of head teachers under whom they worked all determine the make up of a head teacher. (MDE: 11/10/08)

A parent in CBS said this about the head teacher at CBS:

As for [Mr X], if you absent yourself from PTA meetings on two occasions, he will come to your house personally to check on what is happening; so, he makes you feel ashamed that you are not doing what is expected of you [CBS]: 03/11/08).

The SMC chairman of CBS supported this view with this observation:

This head teacher and in fact some of the teachers, treat the children as if they are their own children. The weak students, for example, are kept after school and tutored to make sure that they catch up (SMC chairman: 27/11/08).

A community member in CBS who corroborated the above views, observed that:

The head teacher is invited to many of the activities in the community. Anytime he is attending a programme he comes along with some of his teachers and no matter what the occasion is, he will take the opportunity to speak about the school and remind parents and community members of their responsibility towards their children (community member [CBS]: 24/11/08).

Another community member pointed out that:

... Even when we are doing communal labour, even though many of our own community members do not attend, the head teacher and the teachers organise the school children to come and support with carrying sand and stones or weeding around public places or the chief's palace (community member [CBS]: 10/12/08).

He added:

This is why the teachers are respected and given whatever support they need whether in the school or their private matters. I remember that when the father of one of the teachers died and the community was informed, we all got involved in the funeral and he received a lot of support and donations (community member [CBS]: 10/12/08).

At the Kuku community the situation was different. Even though the head teacher was seen as friendly, many of the teachers were not on good terms with community members because of their non involvement in community life and parents' and community members' perception that they were not teaching their children to pass the BECE as referred to earlier in the text under section 5.1. A municipal education oversight committee member remarked thus:

Many of the teachers are not co-operating with community members and parents. They have the impression that the PTA and the community are not interested in their welfare, so they are not helping the head teacher. He is one man; what can he do? (MEOC member: 12/10/08).

Clearly, the head teacher's effectiveness also depends on the support he gets from his teachers, which in a way also requires teachers who are content and motivated to work as the case in CBS illustrates. It also signals that leadership based on individual ability could only go a distance, but would require a certain critical mass of willing individuals and groups to bring about the needed change.

What was also striking was the willingness of parents and the community in CBS, to support the school and reward teachers as a result of the positive relationship between them and the school, reinforcing the point that even though meeting educational expectations of the community may be a condition for support, what drives the whole process is leadership. In the case of Kuku, both seemed not to have worked – bad relations, poor exam results, which at a point, led to PTA members refusing to pay dues (see chapter 5, section 5.1).

It is important to note however that Kuku had not always been like what has been portrayed. The reference to one Mr. Abban who was a retired head teacher brought back memories of parents and community members who were motivated to show more interest in the affairs of the school and increased their participation because of the leadership style of this retired head teacher and the results the school achieved through his leadership (see chapter 5, section 5.1).

6.2.2 Community Leadership

Respondents seemed to support the view that it requires the collaborative leadership of both community and school to achieve school improvement. This view supports Fry and Epstein's position and my conceptual framework (section 2.5) on the need for collaboration between the school and the community which includes the family. According to the MCE, community action to support schools depends on:

The educational level of the community's leadership; the value that leadership place on education and its determination to improve the lot of its people (MCE: 12/10/08).

A teacher from Kuku commented thus:

I have been in this school for eleven years. The interest the chief and community leaders have in education determine what the community members do. The chief before this current one showed much interest in education and the town people saw it so anything that we did if only he was in town he came around together with his elders. So when the town people get to know that the chief is here they also come (teacher [Kuku]: 22/10/08).

A community member from Kuku believed that the lack of unity among community leadership affect the relationship between the community and the school. Giving an example of this assertion, he said:

We have a chieftaincy problem in this town. Some of the elders are challenging the chief's legitimacy and authority, so there is no peace in this town and the elders are divided. This has affected community work and support even for the school (community member [Kuku]: 18/11/08).

Such a scenario as stated above has the potential of further undermining any attempt of collaboration between the community and the school which already has a strained relationship with the community. This contrasts the situation in CBS where as indicated in (section 6.1.2), stakeholders, led by the community leadership meet and deliberate on matters affecting the school regularly.

Individual leadership

The role of individuals in offering leadership and using that to strengthen the relationship between the community and schools came to the fore, giving a strong indication that in some poor rural communities, whilst formal leadership structures may be useful, individual initiatives may go a long way to fill spaces or compensate for areas formal structures may not be successful.

In the CBS community, for example, one man (Mr Goodman), a former unit committee representative of the municipal assembly, led other members of the community in building a junior high school (JHS) classroom block (see photograph 1, p61), which the community badly needed to address the vastly increased enrolment at the school. According to the MCE:

For his community interest, belief in the future of his community and a willingness to work untiringly despite the lack of official recognition, this single

person helped to make his community school the envy of the whole municipality (MCE 12/10/08).

A community member said of him:

This one man was always on the move. He is a very active person with a lot of influence. He is an effective organiser (MEPT member: 12/10/08).

A retired educationist also commented thus:

Through his perseverance and his ability to relate and work with everybody, he created an environment for this community that encouraged everybody to get involved in community work and affected the way the community related to the school (community member [CBS]: 10/12/08)

6.3 Summary

A central message this chapter resonates, is the fact that school improvement can hardly be achieved if there is lack of accountability and good leadership. An examination of the two sites indicates that the positive results portrayed by CBS were a result of the fact that each party to the 'social contract' tried to fulfil its side of the compact. Also accountability per se does not yield results by itself unless people who have to account are made aware that accountability would be demanded. It is at this point that leadership comes in to drive the process. Where leadership is weak, or feels undermined, its inability to exercise authority leads to breakdown of accountability as was the case at Kuku.

In the next chapter I discuss key issues that emerged from the three analytical chapters and considers its implications for policy and practice.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Implications for Policy and Practice

7.0 Introduction

In this chapter I draw conclusions on the three analytical chapters (4, 5 & 6) and pull together the key issues that emerged from these chapters and discuss their overall significance in terms of community–school relations. Broad themes discussed are, representation and participation in practice, parental space and participation, capacity, accountability and leadership in the context of community engagement with schools.

7.1 Conclusions

Chapter four sought to examine ways in which communities have participated in the running of schools (RQ1); how community stakeholder groups have understood their roles in the decentralised governance of schools, and how they have interpreted and executed them (RQ2); as well as the challenges that emerged from such engagement (RQ3).

Evidence from the sites under study indicates that communities have participated in the running of schools in various ways: fiscal and physical support, inspection and monitoring. For example, the support from SMCs and PTAs filled the gap created as a result of government fiscal deficits and delays in the transfer of funds to schools. As indicated by the MDE, such intervention not only helped schools directly by serving as a stopgap to ensure that they ran smoothly, but it also lifted the burden on the district education office by taking responsibility for a situation over which it had no control.

The admission that sometimes financial transfers are not received for a whole term reinforces the view expressed by Botchway (2000) that even though the aim of community participation is to encourage communities to assume responsibility for their own educational services – thus encouraging them to revise their expectations of the state – promoting such a concept can provide the state with a legitimate opportunity to shirk its responsibilities to communities, even though some of these communities may lack the necessary resources to assume this role. This was particularly the case in Kuku community, quite apart from the issues it had with the teachers that determined the extent of support it was willing to offer.

In the execution of the various roles of community members, educational backgrounds, life experiences and their knowledge base of how the school should function shaped their understanding and interpretation. This determined the approaches they adopted and the extent of their involvement with the school. As a result, the school, the SMC and some community members had different understandings of what their respective roles were or should be. Whilst some teachers saw some aspects of community involvement in its governance as a threat to its professional domain, stakeholders felt that the school should come to terms with the fact that they could do more than merely make a financial contribution.

In particular, SMCs seemed to focus more on activities that promoted their visibility than those that made them invisible. However, there is evidence to indicate that such a posture was not intentional, since a particular function sometimes appeared to be the only one that did not require knowledge of the school, competencies and skills to implement.

Issues of power and conflict also emerged between the various groups and sometimes within the groups themselves. These were indications of the different understandings and interpretations the various groups attached to their roles. This gives credence to the call for orientation and regular training of stakeholders in their functions in order to ensure greater collaboration and cooperation among them.

The role the 'elite' played in the community pointed to the influence that informal groups bring in school – community relations, and which often goes unrecognised especially in how such participation influences school governance. Powerful groups or influential individuals in rural settings could become important agents for improving school-community relations, but could also pose challenges if their involvement is not handled and channelled through recognised structures e.g. the PTA or SMC.

A cardinal aspect of the performance of stakeholder functions was the pivotal role capacity played in determining the degree of participation. Considering the available evidence, policy expectation of SMC and community members' roles, seemed to be based on assumptions about capacity which may be lacking in poor rural settings.

Some of the policy expectations require that community members represented on school governance boards or on PTAs possess financial, administrative, management and leadership capabilities or insights to make the accountability process work. In its absence, this creates the potential for a few educated or other influential people in the community with the requisite competencies to assume responsibility, thus defeating policy expectations of greater representation and participation from the SMC and PTA.

In examining the factors and conditions that shape community–school relations under the decentralised management of schools, and how these factors affect community participation in education (RQ 4), an important insight that emerged was the nature of the community’s aspirations for its children. Such aspirations appear to shape community members and parents’ expectation of the school. Their expectation focused on quality issues, in particular whether the school was successful in progressing children from primary to secondary.

In this regard most community members viewed quality in terms of performance at the BECE, and where the school was considered as not meeting this expectation, interest and commitment to its affairs was lukewarm, or in the extreme, hostile. This raises the issue about what schools themselves need to do to promote greater community commitment. They cannot assume community participation irrespective of their actions and the results they achieve.

Thus, community participation hinges on the idea of a ‘social contract’ between community and school. This study reinforced the point that such a relationship was a two-way one based on reciprocity, and that it was the fulfilment of the expectations of both parties that shaped the relationship between them and determined the nature of the participation of the community in the governance of its schools.

However, what emerged was that even though the policy document clearly showed that the role of the school in the community had been carefully considered, contrasting views – even among the members of the school itself – suggested that school and community perceived their roles differently. Whereas some teachers saw their role as inseparable

from their responsibility to the community, others viewed the two as distinct fields of activity that were mutually exclusive.

On the issue of space for participation, parents, SMCs and community members as a whole, felt that a general invitation to participate was by itself insufficient, and that what was required are real opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. In particular, some SMC, PTA or community members felt that when it came to making key decisions, not enough consultation and discussions took place.

School heads and some teachers; on the other hand felt that involvement of some of the representatives of the various stakeholder groups in decision-making was sufficient. Clearly, some community members and parents thought otherwise. It reflects a weak or non-existent feedback mechanism, which denied the chance for transparent dialogue and wider consultation before important decisions are reached on school governance issues. This is important, especially in rural contexts where powerful elites or influential individuals are likely to exert more influence on school affairs.

The decentralisation policy in which the concept of community participation is embedded assumes the offering of voluntary services by community members and parents. However, this ignores the cost in terms of time and resources to the individuals, and as demonstrated in this study where communities are experiencing economic poverty, and schools are not seen as providing 'value for money', cost becomes an issue. As the evidence indicates, ownership and participation came with a price and this determined how far people were willing to volunteer their services to support the school. In this regard, it was a choice between personal economic survival and free service to the school.

However, other evidence indicates that when parents and community members perceived that they obtained a worthwhile return from investment in their children's education, the idea of cost was discounted, and this was reflected in the interest they showed in the school and its development. The positive response to the demands of private schools in respect of active engagement by parents attests to this assertion.

What appeared to be a major threat to voluntarism was the demand for remuneration for services offered to the school and the intensification of such demands following the introduction of the capitation grant scheme. Here is a classic case of how one education policy is having unintended consequences on another area of policy – greater community participation. Clearly, some in the community saw the capitation as a resource from which they should benefit because of what they saw as work they were doing on behalf of the school, and for its improvement.

The issue of foster parenting raises the question about what parental involvement in schools means in contexts where a great number of children are looked after by foster parents who are unable to discharge parental responsibilities in the same way that the children's birth parents is expected to do. Foster parents and grandparents may not have the same motivations to engage with schools as policy assumes birth parents will have for reasons that this thesis has unearthed. It highlights how policy in these contexts assumes homogenous community characteristics and implications for practice. Here schools may have to do more to understand the backgrounds of the children and what this means in terms of promoting opportunities for their parents or care takers to contribute to their welfare and the school's effort in helping the children progress in their academic development.

Chapter six examined how accountability and leadership can enhance or limit community–school relations (RQ 5). The contrasting examples of the two schools and their communities suggest that where accountability principles are upheld and enforced, this is reflected not only in teachers' professional approaches to work, but it also has the potential to enhance the relationship between community and school, resulting in the fulfilment of their mutual expectations.

The examples of the two schools also point to the fact that the acknowledgement of rules and regulations, systems and structures themselves may not necessarily enhance a greater sense of responsibility. What triggers a sense of responsibility is the sense that rules and regulations are enforceable. The expectations of both school and community appear to have a greater potential for realisation when individuals and groups are made aware of the likely effects of their actions and inactions.

However, this depends on the capacity and willingness of the community and its institutions being given the responsibility to demand accountability, and for them to exercise this right. Whereas this occurred at the CBS community, those in Kuku were unable to exercise such a right. Again, this highlights the gap between policy expectation of the school being made accountable to the community and the incapacity of the community to enforce such rhetoric.

As it turned out, particularly in the case of Kuku, adequacy and timeliness of resource availability played a major role in strengthening the enforcement of accountability systems, the absence of which weakens the resolve of those who are responsible to hold others accountable and compromises their authority.

With regard to leadership, views from the study suggest that the school management's leadership style can contribute significantly in shaping the relationship between community and school. Even though educational level, experience and interest in the well-being of pupils were considered to be key factors, the evidence suggests that the school leadership's (head teacher) understanding of situations; its evaluation of its actions and inactions; its sense of responsibility and urgency; and its conception of accountability are what made the difference in fulfilling the community's educational expectations.

This highlights the need to train head teachers in school leadership and in particular their role in creating healthy community-school relations. Such training will require that heads understand the importance communities attach to quality and how this shapes their levels of commitment and support for the school, but also what threatens this relationship. The ability of school and community to engage seems to depend on how far leadership at these levels perceives their mutual interdependency to be a truly symbiotic relationship.

7.2 Implications for Policy and Practice

7.2.1 Representation and Participation in Practice

Decentralisation of education management is premised on the assumption that it will strengthen democratic processes by ensuring greater participation in the decision-making process at both school and community levels (World Bank, 2003). It is also expected to

lead to efficiency, and to improve accountability and education delivery (Purkey & Smith, 1985). This requires the devolution of responsibilities to decentralised levels, with a strong sense of ownership and participation through community based voluntary service in the affairs of schools.

The Government of Ghana's policy in establishing SMCs was to create a new school governance landscape based on community participation, as well as the devolution of power to the metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies. Thus, the institution of SMCs, together with the encouragement of the formation of PTAs, was supposed to accomplish these objectives. In the discussion that follows, I examine the extent to which the existence of SMCs and PTAs has facilitated representation and participation in practice and thereby enhanced the relationship between communities and schools.

Based on the findings of this study, I argue that many of the theoretical assumptions and policy expectations about improved representation and participation are evident only notionally and have not been put into practice as anticipated, particularly in poor rural contexts such as the study areas. I further argue that in such contexts, it is often local power groupings and the relatively better educated members of the community who become the new brokers of decision-making and, in collaboration with school management, close the spaces for genuine representation and participation by others.

In theory, under decentralised education management, schools and communities are expected to share the responsibility of school improvement. Although this idea was echoed by the SMC, PTA members and other parents in this study, they also pointed out that head teachers and the teaching staff in particular, did not necessarily see shared responsibility as advancing the democratic decision-making process in the school. Rather, participation for school management often meant information sharing after decisions had been made or at best limited consultation, with the head teacher acting as sole intermediary between school staff and the SMC or the PTA chairman.

Such findings are corroborated by the conclusions of Lewis & Naidoo (2004) in their studies of school governance in South Africa, where respondents indicated that in practice, consultation processes were invariably managed by school principals in their own interests.

Tikly (2008) argues that participation means the right of different groups – including those less powerful than the dominant group and those who have been historically marginalised – to have a say in education decision-making. However, ‘having a say’ requires space and genuine opportunity for all who have an interest in the school to voice their opinions and debate the direction in which the school should develop. This was seldom observed to occur as expressed by some SMC and community members, particularly in the Kuku community.

Stakeholder views from Kuku and CBS reveal that to a very large degree, the participation of the community in school governance was piecemeal and dependent almost entirely on the goodwill of the school or the initiative of individual community members, or parents who were willing to acquiesce to the existing strictures of participation.

In practice, participation was limited to matters that served the interests of the school, which were determined by the head teacher sometimes with the support of the SMC or PTA chairman. Often, the head teacher, the SMC and the PTA chairman simply made a joint decision as to who should be consulted on matters affecting the school, with most contributory discussions and decisions made outside the context of SMC or PTA meetings. Community involvement was thus largely restricted to fund-raising and other support¹⁶, being less concerned with decisions on broad education policy issues and school organisation. Teachers also resented community involvement in areas that they considered professional, which obviously created a barrier that limited interest and participation in school governance.

The result was that to a great extent, participation depended on what the community was ‘allowed’ to do by the head of the school or the SMC. In essence, then, community members were denied the right to participate in decision-making. This confirms the observation of McGinn & Welsh (1999) that professionals and bureaucrats have a tendency to protect the invasion of their professional spaces. Participation was therefore a matter of power and influence, and those (the head teacher, SMC chairman, opinion leaders, etc.) who wielded it set and controlled the agenda.

¹⁶ Such support included the provision of tables and chairs, roofing sheets and other requirements that arose from time to time.

Other findings of the study indicate, the SMC itself did not seem to be working as the de facto representative of the community since decisions were sometimes made outside the formal structure, consultation being sought with informal groups instead, such as the 'local elites'. This development reflects similar centralisation characteristics that decentralisation sought to change by the creation of spaces for increased participation and representation at the local level.

However, given the role played by this elite group, ignoring them in any discussion on community participation in schools betrays a myopic appreciation of the different contexts in which schools operate. As evidenced in this study, these individuals and groups are those who have the goodwill of community members and through whom community mobilisation is effected. An appraisal of the roles of such informal power groups provides significant feedback for policy review and a subsequent re-conceptualisation and reconstruction of policy and practice.

One may argue that actions such as taking decisions without the involvement of some members of the SMC and the community may not have been done intentionally, because as the evidence indicates, some community members had to choose between serving voluntarily on the SMC or PTA or attending to their subsistence occupations.

The issue, then, is if community members put significant premium on the priority of subsistence, this has implications for regions with a high prevalence of poverty, since only a few people have the 'luxury' of time to participate in school affairs. In this case, those perceived to be 'hijacking' the SMC and aligning themselves with the school at any given time might be the only ones willing to take up such responsibility.

Other members of the SMC also felt that because they were illiterate, they did not have the requisite insight to express their views or opinions on educational matters, hence their unwillingness to articulate their concerns and interests to the head teacher or the SMC leadership. Thus, in a sense, their lack of education seemed to have limited their ability to exert their opinions on school excellence issues. The notion that community participation in education meant that stakeholders should participate beyond episodic and mere

constituency representation in shaping the way schools were governed rarely occurred in this context.

Thus, spaces for real community participation in which all members of the SMC and PTA took part in the decision-making processes informed by community issues about school improvement rarely took place as expected by policy. In effect, although decentralisation policies aim at strengthening local democracy, participation and efficiency in service delivery, they do not fully consider the conditions under which this might be achieved. Pryor (2005, p.196) points out that the Ministry of Education's shallow understanding of rural contexts with respect to its policy has led to pseudo-participation, and suggests that without a more sophisticated grasp of rural community life and work, the failure of decentralisation policies may be difficult to avoid.

This study further identified other complexities such as the impact of foster parenting and local politics on community engagement with schools. However, sometimes, it may not be the issue of lack of knowledge or understanding of these contextual differences, but rather, the willingness and the political will of policy makers to reflect contextual considerations in policies (Essuman, 2008).

7.2.2 Parental Space and Participation

A key finding of this study was that parental participation in their children's education depends on the spaces created by the school in addition to the trust and recognition accorded parents. Fry (1983); Epstein (1987a); and Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) all suggest that there are positive outcomes to children's education when parents play an active role in the life of the school.

The relationship of Epstein's theory to this study stems from the fact that the model of this study, (community-school relations), also assumes the engagement of parents, the community and the school, and draws on the proviso that the effectiveness of this relationship is underpinned by the degree of capacity, accountability and leadership.

The conceptual framework of the study placed considerable premium on the collaborative efforts of the SMC, PTA/(parents), school and the wider community. The practice indicates

however, that such framework may not have a universal application but may vary depending on contextual considerations, such as, the availability of needed skills and resources, willingness of community members to volunteer and social capital, among others.

Rogovin (2001, p40) argues that there are vast untapped educational talents within the family and opportunities outside the traditional formal classroom structure that could prove to be useful to schools: “families are among the greatest resources of human experience.” However, it is recognised in the present study that since most parents had limited education, this would be difficult to achieve. Rather, schools in this context could take on more responsibility for helping pupils or supporting parents in their efforts to bring about the desired outcomes. This position corroborates some participants’ views that their influence as teachers was enhanced by their involvement in community activities and with parents.

Parents’ Attitudes to Schools

In many rural and poor contexts, the incidence of poverty and the lack of education shape their sense of worth and influence their perception of the school their children attend. They sometimes perceive schools as alien and unwelcoming institution, in spite of the fact that it is located within the community. As observed in the literature (Lareau, 1996; Dornbusch and Glasgow, 1996), low income parents frequently feel alienated from schools and feel inadequate and unwelcome due to disparities in income, education and self-esteem.

However, some evidence in this study, as mentioned earlier, indicates that sometimes it is not a matter of the school limiting opportunities for parental involvement. Rather, it is often the parents and community members who chose to give priority to their economic survival and needs over their involvement in school affairs.

This state of affairs may perpetuate the notion that schools are indifferent or shun the involvement of the deprived in their activities, and can create psychological barriers between parents, community and school. In such circumstances, creating spaces for parents by way of representation may be necessary but insufficient to guarantee their active participation, to ‘have a say’. Having voice does not depend on the number of

spaces but rather on the opportunity to influence decisions, which depends on the environment the school creates for parents to participate in schooling, and a change in parents' sense of alienation from the school. It would require trust, friendship, understanding and change of attitude on the part of teachers and the school to get parents involved in school affairs.

However, in a study on rural Ghana, Pryor (2003, p.59) suggests that schooling and community participation are two distinct and differently structured phenomena which severely constrain attempts to mobilise community social capital for the improvement of schools. He concludes by arguing that if community participation is desirable in itself, the state – through the school – should actively strive for its creation rather than looking to the community to develop the school.

The evidence at Kuku that highlights the incidence of poverty and the lack of available skilled persons to serve on the SMCs in particular, supports this view. It is therefore important that in addressing community participation, policy should not remain oblivious to the unique profile of each community, since it is the ability to address this factor that determines the capacity of parents and communities to engage with schools.

It is important in discussing spaces for participation and voice, not to be oblivious of the dimension of power relations in the relationship between the school, parents and the community. Malen (1994, p.151) has argued that “schools are mini-political systems nested in multi-level government structures, which make decisions through processes that pivot on power exercised in various ways and in various arenas”. In his view school management as people in charge of schools use their resources (stature, information and prerogatives) to set and control the agenda. In the context of this study, the deference to the head teacher by the SMCs and PTAs, particularly in the case of Kuku, in matters that required collective decision-making, and the discretion exercised by heads in deciding whose opinion to seek or who to invite to discuss matters affecting the school seem to support Malen's position.

On Epstein's six types of family involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and community collaboration) and its relationship to the

conceptual framework, it played out differently in the study as the following discussions portray.

Parenting – The evidence of parental care was not universal. While some parents, though illiterate, assumed responsibility for their children's development to the extent that when academic performance could not be assured in a state school, they did all they could to educate their children in private schools, others as a result of poverty left their children to fend for themselves by engaging in the fishing business, and thus, exposing them to adulthood too early in life. As a consequence, it resulted in pupil drop out and also affected academic performance.

Communicating – Communication between the two schools and their communities varied. Even though in both cases they were mainly between the SMC chairmen and PTA chairmen and the head teacher, the executive at CBS could disseminate information through PTA, SMC and stakeholder meetings and through that got community members and parents engaged. This did not seem to be the case in Kuku where community members and parents were not attending meetings, thus severely affecting the information flow between the school and the community. For example, in Kuku many parents did not seem to show interest in what went on in school as they did not frequently attend school activities such as open days to have the opportunity to interact with their children's teachers and inquire about their progress. As a teacher indicated, sometimes the children's terminal academic reports are not even collected by some parents.

Volunteering – This is a key assumption in the concept of decentralisation and as the evidence suggests this was linked to the fulfilment of community expectations, such as academic progress and reciprocal activities between the community and the school. In most cases volunteering had diminished as a result of this expectation not being met as well for economic reasons.

Learning at home – School readiness, homework support, depended mainly on the value parents and families placed on education and how they felt their personal involvement mattered in the academic development of their children. Thus, whereas, some parents saw the need of supporting their children's learning at home directly or indirectly by the support

of family members or others in the community, other parents did not really see their role after school as a responsibility or value adding to the education of their children.

These stance support Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) theory that decisions and choices parents make are based on several constructs including their personal construction of parental role, i.e. what they believe they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education. At the community level, there were no community resources like libraries and community centres and study areas where children whose homes were not conducive to learning could probably use at week-ends.

Decision-making – Involving the community and parents in the governance of schools was the basis for the formation of the SMCs and the PTAs but as the evidence suggests this rarely occurred effectively. In both schools and communities decision - making was limited to the head teacher and some executives of the PTA/SMC and sometimes the 'elites' in the community, resulting is some SMC members complaining, particularly, in Kuku, about they being sidelined.

Community collaboration – Community collaboration was to a greater extent achieved, particularly with regard to mobilisation of resources to address needs of schools. This appeared to be a major function the SMC, PTA and the community as a whole understood and executed as their role.

The above account stresses the importance of the need to strengthen parental engagement with schools. Considering PTAs as direct stakeholders offering the greatest support to schools, they could use their financial strength and influence to leverage for the creation of additional spaces and increased voice in the management of schools.

7.3 Capacity

Capacity has become a major discussion topic in decentralisation discourses. Critics of decentralisation have argued about the lack of technical and human resource availability at the local level (e.g. Crook & Sverrisson, 1999; Prud'homme, 1995; Samoff, 1990; Smith, 1985; Tanzi, 1995). It seems to take a central stage in decentralisation processes and has been used as the reason for non-performance of sub-national decentralised level, and the

central level's 'unwillingness' to devolve functions and cede power and authority to decentralised levels.

Throughout this study, there appear to be good grounds to suggest that this assertion is factual. In interpretation of and execution of roles it came to the fore that deficits in knowledge about schools, skills and other competencies needed for effective engagement were lacking. It was also observed that even though some SMC members complained of being sidelined, some of their membership admitted that the real issue was their inability to perform the watchdog role on behalf of the community.

In attempting to find local solutions to local concerns, rural communities must be supported to utilise all available resources. The school is one of such resource and has a major role to play. The process can be legitimised by education authorities through head teachers and facilitated by key individuals within the school and community, including representatives from business and local government sectors. The development and sustainability of effective community-school partnerships rely on the extent to which rural schools and communities learn how to adapt, work around, and shape policy.

At the heart of effective partnerships are good school–community relations. Working on improving this relationship will bring more and more the school and the community together and by working together and learning together, social capital is created and used, resulting in increased individual and community capacity. This supports the view that the development and sustainability of community-school partnerships represents a key strategy for rural community development.

Capacity building discussions and activities normally focus on education personnel at the head office and at district offices, with little or no attention given to the professional development of teachers that would enable them to meet the challenges confronting policy implementation at the local level. Again, from my professional insights as a senior official driving government educational policy agenda, inadequate budgetary provisions are made for training and developing personnel who will take up these new roles at the decentralised levels.

There seems to be little appreciation that the transformation expected from the implementation of education decentralisation should occur mainly at school and community levels, and not at the education office. This lack of forethought has resulted in too much attention on decentralised district education offices and head offices, and not enough on schools and communities. Workshops focus on education office personnel rather than school and community members. However, capacity building at the school and community level is critical for the successful implementation of decentralisation policies. Head teachers may lack strategic leadership; human resource management; planning; and, particularly, community building and community support strategies.

Over the two decades since Ghana embarked on the decentralisation process, attention has focused more on discussions and workshops on policy than on the physical tasks that need to be implemented for decentralisation to function successfully at school and community levels. Addressing the challenges that confront sub-national units – and rural schools in particular – will from the evidence of this study, speed up the expected outcomes of education decentralisation.

Caldwell (2003) observes that it is one thing to pass legislation that shifts power, authority, responsibility and influence from one level to the other – such a shift in his view is a change in structure – but it is another thing to build the capacity to enable the desired impact on learning and to change the culture at all levels. To facilitate such an action, evidence from this study suggests that there should be strong support for schools and communities, which is often best done at the regional and district levels. The need for capacity is no doubt real but it is sometimes overstretched or used as a facade or an excuse to empower decentralised levels, and thus delays the devolution of functions to them.

However, as an attempt is made to draw attention to the role central authority plays in this whole process, it is important to point out that without the understanding, a sense of responsibility and urgency by the community members at the decentralised level, it may be difficult to fulfil the expectations of education decentralisation. It will therefore require greater collaboration from the community.

In this context, the experience at the Kuku community is a good reference. Even though some SMC and community members expressed a desire for the school to help develop their capacity to deepen their knowledge base about the school, their own functions and engagement with the school, those who really needed that exposure could not take advantage of it because either they did not have time or they did not see the value for it. If that had happened it could have helped provide them with some knowledge, skills and competencies.

In this regard, their capacity to demand accountability from the school remained undermined. The 'elite' (SMC and PTA chairmen and others) who could have taken up this role had by their working closely with school management become too familiar and part of the very matters they could demand accountability on, but they had already compromised their position.

The significance of capacity this study has unearthed should help in answering the question, whose capacity needs to be developed? Is it the capacity of the headquarters, regional and district (decentralised) education officers or is it at the school and community levels? The evidence from this study suggests that the need is more at the school and community levels where changes that could lead to school improvement are expected.

This will help in refocusing on redefining the kind of capacity necessary for community institutions, such as the PTA, SMC and the identifiable groups in the wider community as well as the school, and resource allocation made and training programmes designed based on needs to ensure the effective implementation of the education decentralisation agenda. It is important for any new or revision of policy landscape to take account of resource allocations skewed towards pro-poor communities.

7.4 Accountability

It is envisaged under decentralisation of education management that the involvement of parents and community in decision-making will enhance accountability (Purkey & Smith, 1985; Robinson, 2007). Leithwood and Earl, (2000) also point out that the power to make decisions about budgets, procurement, personnel etc., is in the hands of parents/community constituents of schools.

However, such an expectation, as evidence from this study indicates, may not always be realised. In the discussion that follows, I argue that weak supervision by head teachers; the lack of capacity of community members to demand accountability; and the advantageous position that schools are in, with regard to the power relationship between them and the community, and sometimes the availability of needed resources determine the extent of accountability.

Community members need stature, social capital, knowledge of the school and power to enable assertiveness in their demand for accountability. None of these, in this study's context, appears to be available in the measure necessary to empower them to assume the responsibility of demanding accountability, either from the school or from their own representatives on the SMC.

Weak School Supervision

Conyers (2006) for example, argues that the poor outcomes of education decentralisation in Africa mainly stem from the fundamental characteristics of contemporary African states, such as, weak systems and structures of accountability. Indeed, decentralisation outcomes from country reviews (Essuman, 2008) seem to confirm this position. For example, in Zimbabwe and Uganda, weak systems and structures have led to the manipulation of teacher and pupil numbers, inflation of claims, diversion of funds and other corrupt practices (ibid).

Nevertheless, whilst this may be true in the cases cited, evidence from the present study shows that in some instances, it may not necessarily be due to weak accountability systems since guidelines on school accountability are clearly spelt out, for example, in the instructions given in the *Head teachers Handbook*. It appears that it is more about the lack of strong supervision and enforcement of rules and regulations. Head teachers may be aware of what to do when their members of staff compromise on professional standards, but as expressed by one head teacher, considering the conditions under which rural teachers work, they may empathise with staff instead of enforcing discipline. Such working and living conditions compromise head teachers' role as manager of schools and could weaken the administrative oversight they are expected to provide.

In the literature, administrative lapses, such as inadequate planning and lack of resources (Armenia and Uganda); and the increased use of untrained teachers and delays in payment of salaries (Uganda and Zimbabwe) have been cited as serious detriments to a positive outcome in the education decentralisation process (Essuman, 2008). In discussing the effects of poor teacher accountability (section 6.1.1), problems associated with delays in payment of salaries and deficits in teacher supply in poor rural areas were raised, as these administrative bottlenecks bring head teachers working in such areas under intense pressure and undermine their ability to exercise authority and enforce discipline. Thus, they commonly find themselves faced with a dilemma and are compelled to tread cautiously.

In the Ghanaian context, few teachers willingly accept postings to rural areas (MOE, 2008), which means that head teachers in such areas sometimes count themselves fortunate to have teachers who willingly accept posting to their schools. Such a situation makes it difficult for head teachers to effectively supervise staff because of the social cost of strict enforcement of the rules, the wariness of losing staff and the fear of compromising their own positions with the authorities (Pryor, 2003).

Community, School and Accountability

Community members, who are the eventual beneficiaries of education, are expected to make the school accountable through the SMC. However, rural communities face many challenges, including weak knowledge of school-related issues, which affect their capacity to assume such a responsibility. As found out in the study, such people's skills are often quite weak and often lack the confidence to enable them to become involved with schools. Such a state of affairs contributes greatly to what appears to be the inability of communities to demand accountability from schools.

As noted earlier, the SMC's self-appointed role as inspectors of schools and teachers' regulatory body created unintended outcomes. Even though the policy on education decentralisation and the regulations governing the operations of SMCs never prescribed this role to the SMC, its adoption points to the fact that accountability should be approached within a certain framework, within which the responsibilities of both the

accountable actor and the one demanding accountability are made explicit. The consequences of actions and inactions on both sides should also be made clear within this framework, together with an enumeration of the tools and logistics required for the delivery of outcomes.

The types of verification or performance indicators should also be identified. In a sense, this would also help narrow the different interpretations of responsibility of both SMC and school. Bovens, (2008) supports this view when he suggests that account giving and account holding processes cannot operate without standards against which the conduct of actors are assessed (p19).

It was noted earlier that the school did not believe it was accountable to the community; rather, it believed it was accountable to the education directorate. This attitude may be explained by the fact that the directorate was the appointing authority and had the power to impose sanctions. This then raises a contradiction between what the policy on community participation intended and what administrative procedures stipulate.

Whereas under community participation, the community, at least in theory, is expected to make the school accountable to it, another set of administrative regulations, the Civil Service Act, (1960) and the Ghana Education Service Act, Act 506 (1995), require a reporting mechanism in the official governance structure, thus seemingly sidelining the community and contributing to the erosion of the power of the community to demand accountability from the school.

For example, according to the *Code of Professional Conduct*, a teacher suspected of misconduct, must appear before the district disciplinary committee (MOE, *Head Teachers Handbook*, 1994 p35). However, no SMC or community member is represented on this committee. Such administrative procedures are therefore contrary to the overall policy objectives on education decentralisation and seem to contribute to the perception that the communities' role in such matters is minimal or not needed. The inability of schools to hold themselves accountable to the communities has implications not only in terms of the future involvement of the community but also for the overall success of education decentralisation itself. It also shapes the kind of relationship between the school and the community.

In many developing countries where there is a legacy of hierarchical or top-down models of education management from colonial days, shifting accountability to local levels represents a radical change. Not only do those in power at central and middle levels of management have to give up control, but also those at the school and community level have to be willing and capable of operating in new ways. Further, new forms and responsibilities with respect to accountability must shift to school levels, whereby accountability becomes outward to parents and local communities as well as upward to regional or central authorities.

Clearly, the professional development or learning needed to make such shifts is enormous. As Hanson (1997) observed:

Decentralization is not created by passing a law. Rather it must be *built* by overcoming a series of challenges at the centre and the periphery by, for example, changing long established behaviours and attitudes, developing new skills, convincing people in the centre who enjoy exercising power to give it up, permitting and sometimes encouraging people to take creative risks, promoting and rewarding local initiatives, and maintaining continuity with the decentralization reform even as governments change. (Hanson, 1997:14)

7.5 Leadership

In much of the literature and discourses on education decentralisation and community participation, two fields that appear to have received a great deal of attention are participation and accountability, together with related concepts such as decision-making and school governance and capacity. Findings from the present study confirm that these concepts alone, laudable as they may seem, rarely lead to school improvement.

The present study identified this shortcoming as a policy gap. In this study, the central role that leadership played in school improvement and in influencing the nature of the relationship between community and school came to the fore. This confirms that the different outcomes from the two study sites were due not only to disparate contextual situations, but also to the differing characteristics of the actors leading the processes of schooling.

Marzano et al. (2005) observe that given the perceived importance of leadership, it is no wonder that an effective principal is thought to be a necessary precondition for an effective school. Lipham (1981) concludes that there are no good schools with poor principals or poor schools with good principals. Tikly and Barrett (2009) also argue that it may be possible to identify some universal elements of quality in education; however, no two schools are the same and no two learners are the same. By extension, no two head teachers may be the same. This seems to suggest that apart from the roles that parents and teachers play, improvement of schools, perhaps, depends even more on the style of leadership exhibited, irrespective of whether it is state or private. In effect, greater attention to leadership development could make a difference to public school governance.

The discretion the school assumed to instil discipline on its own teachers and on parents in CBS for inactions and non-compliance and the recognition of excellence, brought to the fore a sense of responsibility between the SMC, PTA, the school and the community at large. On the other hand, the lack of such accountability systems, and most importantly its enforcement by the school leadership and the SMC/PTA may have led to the lethargic attitude of the head teacher in his dealings with his staff and other actors at the Kuku school/community.

The signal appears to be that where people feel accountable they perform. However, heads of schools ought to be prepared for leadership roles. For example, a recent study conducted in Ghana revealed that about 76 percent of basic school head teachers had not received teacher development training since first being appointed (EdQual, 2008).

Experiences at Kuku make the need for leadership even more compelling, considering the inadequacy of resources available in a rural area setting. The enormity of such a challenge makes preparation for leadership not an option but an imperative. For example, problems of implementation are actually issues about how leaders influence behaviour, change the course of events and overcome resistance.

Leadership is crucial in managing and implementing decisions successfully. The challenges that have arisen as a result of decentralisation of education management are enormous. District level and school level managers are expected to take on new

responsibilities and make decisions that were not previously in their purview. Skills based training, while it is necessary, must be strengthened with instruction in the substance of education leadership. This is the gap that needs to be addressed.

The positive role community leadership could play in the life of the school cannot be overemphasised (World Bank, 2001; Cooke & Kothari, 2001), as it continues to be the pivot on which community mobilisation turns. Views from the community, the school, the MCE and the DDE attested to this. If leadership is considered key, focusing on the school alone in a partnership that is also expected to involve the community may not achieve the desired results. Leadership concerns should therefore be addressed at both school and community levels, including creating spaces for individuals and groups who may not be part of formal structures to have voice in the affairs of schools. However, the question remains as to how and when teachers who are promoted to heads acquire these traits.

Chapman, (2002) has stated that in many educational systems, no department is clearly responsible for administrative training. In his view, it falls through the cracks or is grafted onto teacher training courses almost as an afterthought. Post-service or in-service training is weak or non-existent (ibid) and concludes that those 'forced' into becoming administrators are sometimes blamed for inept management without considering what they have or have not learnt during their teacher training.

Chapter Eight: Reflections

In this final chapter I reflect on the research process in terms of professional insights I gained and make suggestions for further research.

8.1 Professional Insights and Policy Implications

From the policy perspectives this study has given exposure to some of the reasons why implementation of policies fail mainly as a result of lack of understanding of the different contextual situations that exist and how that shapes what happens at the local level. This 'knowledge' or understanding deficit, one could argue, contributes greatly to the policy practice gap that increasingly is seen in many education systems in low-income countries.

In this thesis, we see just how factors operating outside formal school governance bodies play an equally important role, in shaping the outcomes of policy. Hitherto, considerable attention, from the policy perspective has focused on central government's or the Ministry of Education's understanding of how schools and communities should work and how communities should assume increased participation in schools and less on how these bodies should be backed with the requisite support.

The policy assumptions of resource availability, free voluntary community service, increased participation (including decision-making), accountability, community leadership and collaboration between stakeholders, do not always work out as policy expects creating a policy and practice gap, which appears to be more pronounced in poor rural communities.

As someone who had enormous responsibility for policy this research has been an 'eye opener' into the real world of practice. As a policy maker, the need to nurture a more consultative and broader feedback process could have the potential of reducing the policy practice gap. In this regard, policy-making processes need to be more evidenced-based, so policies have a good chance of making the difference they intend to make. For example, the policy on education decentralisation should reflect the local factors which can shape outcomes and find expression in the intent and direction of policy.

8.2 Relevance to Education Sector Plan (ESP)

The Education Sector Plan in Ghana is a 5 year education development programme with details about strategy and priorities for improving the delivery of basic education in Ghana. Overall, the plan aims to improve educational access and quality through a decentralised system of education delivery. It assumes an important role for SMCs and PTAs for achieving its objectives. This study demonstrates that the expected role of SMCs and PTAs in improving quality cannot be assumed to be easy and straightforward, especially in rural contexts.

Tensions and conflicts can undermine that role especially if there are powerful elites whose voice and contribution are such that they overshadow or intimidate that of SMCs or PTAs. What the Ghana ESP has not factored in its strategy is how schools and SMCs/PTAs are to relate to their wider community in ways that harness any existing potential for the benefit of the school. This study clearly speaks to this issue. There should be renewed emphasis in the ESP on capacity building for SMC and PTA, but through more activities and events which allow as much representation from the wider school community, especially in rural settings.

8.3 The Utility of the Conceptual Framework

This study has largely confirmed the school community relationships framework as described in chapter 2, p34, but more importantly added dimensions that were not anticipated when I constructed the framework after the review of the literature. Firstly, there are clearly strong tensions which skew the nature of the relationship between the school and the SMC/PTA that arise from how different stakeholders in the community engage with the school. The school has to engage cautiously with the formal bodies representing the community as well as the opinion leaders and elites who contribute but exert their own pressures.

My construction in the framework of the role that leadership, accountability and capacity play in school community relations has somewhat evolved into one in which I see the way these interact as tempered by the cultural context. Within rural areas, as this study has shown, it is the way in which especially leadership is culturally constructed that determines who participates, whose voice is valued, and how that feeds into decision making on

school matters. In summary, this study reinforces the assumptions behind the framework, but also sheds new insights about the cultural interpretation and practice of leadership on school community relations.

8.4 Further Research

8.4.1 Is Voluntarism Under Threat?

Offering one's services on a voluntary basis is a key assumption of the policy on community participation in education. As found out in the study the cost of offering such service in poor rural contexts had not been well-considered, resulting in the waning spirit of such altruism and the demand for remuneration for services rendered by the community. Voluntarism as an institution seems to be under threat. Both policy and communities would benefit from an investigation into ways of arresting this trend.

8.4.2 Gender Dimensions in Community – School Relations

While discussing foster parenting I drew attention to traditional prescriptions for women in society as far as childcare and children's schooling is concerned. It was not only in fostering that women played predominant roles. Throughout this study even though they did not have much voice in the affairs of organised bodies such as the SMC and the PTA, they appeared to be the ones who showed more interest in the well-being of their children's education than men. For example, attendance lists of PTA meetings suggested that women formed three quarters of people in attendance.

In this study, I did not consider the gender dimensions to community-school relations in the Ghanaian rural context. However, women's role as traditionally prescribed appears very significant to ignore in any relationship between the community and the school. A future research on the gender dimensions in community-school relations would be constructive.

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Appendix 1

Education Decentralization: Review of Policies Practices and Outcomes¹⁷

Country	Triggers/Motives for decentralisation	Policy	Practices	Outcomes
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political Educational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decentralisation to the school level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers selected their own principals Schools - owned by local authorities Autonomy constitutionally guaranteed Financing by central government Funds transferred by block grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process was fragmented due to inadequate planning Local schools manipulated funding formulae for more funds Inefficient management of schools Lack of administrative capacity of local school officials
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political – To confront regional problems in Spain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decentralised to 17 autonomous regional units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Democratically elected reps. Funds were transferred from central to regional coffers through block grants for education and other purposes Adopted school-based management system run by school councils made up of elected parents, teachers and students School councils elected school directors from among candidates in the teaching ranks Central Ministry retained control over the hiring of teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding for education increased during the 1980's Quality of education improved. Many councils were slow to assert themselves in the management of schools Talented teachers were reluctant to take on the responsibilities of school directorship, largely due to absence of enhanced salary or incentives A strong consensus was forged among political leaders as a result of political stability.
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational – To promote local autonomy in Brazil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decentralised to schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each school received grants based on enrolment and special needs. The Board decides on the disbursements of the funds as well as other funds raised locally. Board sets short and long term goals for schools. Board makes decisions on curriculum, pedagogy, school calendar etc. Principals were elected for three year terms by the school community by secret ballot Teacher Union issues and negotiations were maintained at the centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus building among stakeholders including churches, the academia community and government workers. 85% of primary schools had elected principals 3 years after the reform Principals in many cases with their knowledge and experience called the shots There was greater transparency in decision -making leading to increased operational efficiency. There were tensions between local actors but little attention was given to the training of Boards in conflict resolution. Results in 1994 compared to 1992 indicated increased test scores (7% Science; 20% in Portuguese; 41% in Math.

¹⁷ **Source:** Essuman,(2008), Education Decentralisation: A Review of Policy, Practices and Outcomes, Sussex School of Education, University of Sussex

Country	Triggers/Motives for decentralizat'n	Policy	Practices	Outcomes
New Zealand	Educational – elimination of bureaucratic structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminated intermediate levels and decentralised directly to schools. • Abolished Regional level administration entirely • Shifted responsibility for budget allocation, staff employment, and educational decision making to individual schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus developed before reforms were initiated. • The Prime Minister, David Lange took over the education portfolio himself to signal its importance. • Funding was from the national treasury to schools via a formula-driven capitation grant • Schools accessed the money through a 'bulk funding' plan that covered all expenses including teacher's salaries. • Schools could raise their own revenues, but not by charging tuition • National curriculum was adopted but provision was made for schools to add local components • Schools are run by Boards of Trustees consisting of 5 elected parents, the principal, an elected staff representative, and for secondary schools, a student and 4 other people chosen to provide expertise or balance. • National subsidies were weighted to reflect the special needs of schools serving these populations. • Central government created a semi-autonomous body to carry out in depth school evaluations, the results of which were posted on the school's bulletin board. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff of the central ministry reduced • Teachers complained about increase work loads • Some School Board members took office without adequate training for their new responsibilities • Predicted cost savings did not materialise because many schools opted for increased quality rather than financial savings.
Armenia	<p>Politically and economically driven -</p> <p>The existing educational system could not respond to the requirements of the emerging market.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To decentralise the education system and increase the autonomy of educational institutions in management and financing and to encourage private participation in education. 	<p>Educational establishments were governed by school committees, comprising members elected from among parents, teachers and members of the community.</p> <p>State financed schools through Capitation Grants.</p> <p>Schools drew up their own budgets, executed them and accounted for expenditure.</p> <p>Government assumed responsibility for the curricula.</p> <p>Piloted 10% of schools to learn from the experience before introducing them on a wider scale.</p>	<p>There was lack of preparation and awareness of the stakeholders at the beginning of the reform which resulted in weak support from the population and some slowness in getting the reform started.</p> <p>At all levels of government, fear and a refusal to let go power created artificial difficulties and resistance.</p> <p>Furthermore, the laws and regulations that governed the decentralization process were incompatible with existing laws.</p>

Country	Triggers/Motives for Decentralisat'n	Policy	Practices	Outcomes
Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational, as a result of - ✓ Low quality of education ✓ Delays in the payment of teachers ✓ Lack of access to school ✓ In poor states, 80% of children not in school ✓ Teachers waited more than a year before getting their first salaries. ✓ Payroll mistakes rectified only after a costly and time consuming trip to the capital. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralisation of education management to 31 States of the Republic of Mexico in three stages: 1978-1982; 1983-1988; 1989-1992 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual States responsible for - ✓ Budgeting and management of schools. ✓ Development of the curriculum and textbooks ✓ Revenue generation. • Drafting of national core curriculum and labour policy remained in Mexico City. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre school enrolment Increased in rural areas, as did primary and secondary school enrolment rates. • Government was preoccupied with economic restructuring and other issues and was thus too weak to carry out the objectives of the decentralisation agenda. • An attempt to give the States independence from central control failed largely because of opposition from the teachers' union, which could not relish the thought of negotiating working conditions and other matters with 31 separate States • A change in government in 1988, opened up negotiations with the Union's leadership for the transfer of authority from the centre to the States. • There was resistance from staff members of the central ministry who feared loss of jobs.
Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political and Educational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make education universal and to decentralize public services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central government hired and paid teachers and provided grants for each student • The ministry of Education designed the curriculum, conducted exams and took responsibility for the training of teachers • Construction of primary schools was left to local communities • Management of schools was delegated to missions, large farms, mines, or newly established rural and district councils • District Councils received direct grants to cover salaries and general office expenses from the Ministry of Local Government (MLG). • DCs had authority to hire and fire teachers • MLG disbursed to schools the per Capita grants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers complained about delays in payment of their salaries. • Some district councils wrongfully retained some of the pupils grants for non- educational activities instead of passing them on to the individual schools. • Teacher numbers were inflated by the DC's and government realized that they were paying the salaries of 'ghost teachers'. • The quality of education lowered. • There was turf war between the Ministries of Education and the Ministry of Local Government. • The District Councils controlled by the MLG lacked managerial capacity to operate a decentralized system as originally conceived.

Country	Triggers/Motives for decentralisation	Policy	Practices	Outcomes
Chile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational - <p>43% of the children of the low income group had no access to formal schooling.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 1980 the authority to run schools was transferred to Chile's 385 Municipalities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A voucher system was used for the payment of salaries based on monthly attendance Schools and municipalities gained control over hiring and firing, setting of wages and school construction Curriculum matters remained at the Centre Limited provisions were made for participation of parents, teachers and other stakeholders in school policy making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The decentralization effort did not go according to plan During difficult economic times, the plan was suspended The municipalities lacked the capacity to carry out their new responsibilities Teacher unions were banned. A change in government in 1990 restored the image of teachers and gave them a voice in decision-making.
Venezuela	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political and Economic - Decentralization used as a strategy for economic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country was divided into 9 regional administrative territories and given responsibilities to each of the central governments major portfolios including education. The new system entirely by-passed the existing government structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considerable authority for planning, budgeting and managing was given to each region. State governors accepted only schools that are in good physical condition, educational programmes that met minimum standards and teachers who met minimum standards. State governors sought guarantees for regular financial transfers including teacher pensions. Lack of continuity in leadership as successive governments made repeated changes in personnel and policies. Party loyalists were promoted directly from the classroom to senior ministry posts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The regionalization plan ran into operational political difficulties Programmes developed at great expense of time and money were abruptly terminated before their effectiveness could be evaluated Corruption was prevalent Operational Inefficiency
Columbia	<p>Political –</p> <p>The decentralization of education was a strategy for pulling Colombia back from the brink of chaos.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government's strategy for decentralization was a twofold effort to ✓ "municipalize" basic education and to ✓ increase the autonomy of local schools. <p>The first objective was achieved by financial transfers to Depts. and municipalities and by giving schools responsibility for managing personnel, designing aspects of the curriculum finance.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education in Bogotá held the purse strings for education took charge of curricula, textbooks, and matters of educational policy.</p> <p>Teachers were made employees of the central government, salaries were negotiated at the national level, parents, teachers and students gained greater voice in the running of schools.</p> <p>Inspection of schools which was from the centre, Bogotá, was eliminated.</p> <p>A bottom-up approach was adopted for educational planning instead of a top-down approach.</p> <p>A voucher system for poor students at the secondary school level was introduced.</p>	<p>Resistance from the Teachers' Union.</p> <p>The National Planning Department and the Education and Finance Ministries were involved but had widely different interests and perspectives.</p> <p>Parents and community groups were not well organized, nor were the mayors and governors, who had only recently been elected.</p> <p>Moreover, lingering distrust of both the central government and the Teachers' Union was strong.</p> <p>The impact of decentralisation was severely limited by the failure to obtain consensus and the support of important players, including the teachers who deliver education in the classroom</p>

Appendix 2

School Governance Structures – Country Experiences

Hong Kong introduced SMCs in 1999 and set them up in all state schools, with a view to achieving efficient and effective school management, thus enhancing quality education (Mok & Tan, 2004). Among its secondary objectives were the opening up of the management mechanism to staff, parents and members of the public; and widening the spectrum of school management in the interests of more inclusive representation. Responsibilities included setting goals and performance targets; preparing the annual plan and budget; ensuring the smooth running of the school; piloting and evaluating educational initiatives; presenting education favourably to pupils; planning the professional development of teachers; and establishing effective channels of communication.

As a way of combating the challenges facing quality education delivery in the country, the federal government in Nigeria put in place school based management committees (SBMCs) in all 36 states of the federation, and initiated activities that would allow all the stakeholders in education to have a say in the overall development of education in the country. In the government's view:

Considering the challenges facing quality education delivery in our country, it is evident that there is a compelling need for all stakeholders in the sector to make genuine and concerted commitment towards pooling together resources, intellectual ability and capabilities towards ensuring that basic education delivery does not become an overbearing task borne by an entity called government, hence the reason the paradigm for school management had to change from centralisation and exclusion to decentralisation and inclusion (Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria, 2008).

In Pakistan, the beginning of the 1998–99 academic year saw the establishment of SMCs, “to strengthen the education system and to enlarge the circle of involvement” (Commonwealth Education Fund, 2004). Accordingly, funds were provided by the government for tuition and the repair of furniture and buildings (Ibid.).

In Ghana, community participation is a key component of the policy on the decentralisation of education management and the various education reform agendas. In 1995, the Ghana Education Service reviewed its management structures at the headquarters, regional and district levels in an attempt to bring authority and responsibility for service more under the

auspices of the communities. As a result of this review, SMCs and PTAs were formed and charged with the responsibility of rekindling community spirit in improving education – especially at the basic education level – and of empowering communities to analyse their own schooling problems and adopt strategies to improve teaching and learning. A summary of their functions is produced below.

The School Management Committee (SMC)

The SMC was introduced to promote effective community participation and involvement in the education delivery system at school level. The SMC is designated under the Ghana Education Service Act of 1995 and has been established as a national requirement in all public basic schools. The SMC, unlike the PTA, is composed of various interest groups in the community. It aims to foster effective community participation and mobilisation for efficient education provision and delivery.

Thus, the SMC is regarded as the basic education equivalent of the board of governors in senior secondary school: its main function is to support the school management. Specifically, it has responsibility for four main areas of school management: policy, development, administration and finance. In terms of administration, the SMC is expected to work hand in hand with the head teacher. However, in order to avoid conflict with the head in professional matters, in reality the SMC plays a minimal role in school administration, and the organisation of teaching and learning, as well as the running of the school, is in the hands of the head (Addae-Boahene & Akorful, 1999 p9; Appendix 2).

The Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

The PTA is a joint body of the parents and teachers of a school, and is made up of between six and nine executive members who are selected from the parents or guardians of children at the school. However, its membership increases or decreases according to individual enrolments. The PTA seeks to advance the welfare and development of the school. Its main aims and objectives include, bringing parents and school authorities together to work jointly on school development projects; forging strong ties between the home, the school and the community; helping in fundraising for the provision of furniture, classroom blocks, sports equipment and lighting; and assisting in the maintenance and repair of school infrastructure. Additionally, the PTA sometimes assists in solving problems

such as disciplinary issues, whereby the parent(s) of a pupil found to be misbehaving may be invited to help address the problem. It should be pointed out that unlike SMCs, which are mandatory in all schools, PTAs are not.

Appendix 3

Community Participation in Practice

The following section summarises the involvement of SMCs and PTAs in the life of schools in selected countries, describing their respective participatory processes. It also looks at some of the downsides of SMC/PTA participation. Malawi, Nigeria and Pakistan were selected because of their similar national and developmental characteristics in relation to Ghana. Examples from the USA have also been reviewed to examine how such relationship has been managed at the other side of the globe.

Rose (2003) reports that in Malawi, SMCs constructed schools, maintained them and made governance and policy decisions about them. Community members were encouraged to participate in genuine decision-making, including community identification of locally recruited instructors and the promotion of locally relevant curricula (Rose, 2003 p51).

In many communities in Nigeria, PTA contributions take the form of financial contributions to schools for construction, and supply of equipment and other teaching and learning materials (Ejeh, 2005). Education development in some parts of the country has witnessed the increased involvement of communities.

A study in Oyo and Ondo states of the roles of four communities in the development of schools in their areas revealed that each of them had established at least one secondary school between 1976 and 1981 on its own initiative (Ejeh, 2005). In some cases, the local branches of carpenters' and bricklayers' unions offered their services free of charge, whilst others provided communal labour for the maintenance of the school and its grounds on a number of occasions.

In instances of subjects for which there were no regular teachers, some parents with the requisite qualifications undertook to teach pupils free of charge, in their spare time. Some parents, and even whole communities, were known to make representations to the local inspector of education, the school board or the Ministry of Education to cancel the transfer of teachers who they felt were doing good jobs in local schools; with some lobbying for the posting of particularly good teachers to their schools (Ibid.).

In Pakistan, members of the SMC are supposed to visit schools on a regular basis to check on the absenteeism of teachers; to monitor the teaching and learning process and pupils' level of interest; and to solicit funds from both the government and the private sector. The SMC is also duty bound to secure, receive, accept and manage funds, donations, grants and endowments from legitimate sources (CEF, 2004).

Schorr (1997) highlights some community-based programmes that have linked communities with schools in some states of the USA. For example, the New York Beacon Schools Project targeted selected neighbourhoods and transformed some schools into community centres, which were made available to adults for 356 days a year. Through this, Schorr notes, at one site:

Academic performance at the school has improved dramatically, rising from 580th out of 620 city elementary schools in reading achievement in 1991 to 319th three years later. Attendance has also improved, and police report fewer felony arrests among neighbourhood youth (ibid, p47).

In describing the Missouri Caring Communities Programme – a partnership among local communities and school districts – Schorr states:

Families in crisis are linked with intensive in-home supports and services. Children having difficulty at home or in school can get tutoring and attend after school programmes and summer camps. For older children, the community centre offers fitness classes, homework help, ping-pong and pool, and Saturday night dances. Karate classes instil discipline and allow older students to mentor and demonstrate their mastery to younger ones...Many parents have become active in school parent organisations and volunteer work, and some hold jobs in the school. Others have come to see it (the school) as a refuge and comfortable place to spend time (Schorr, 1999 p96).

While the above instances point to the support SMCs give to schools, such support may not be universally assumed, as other evidence suggests that in most of these countries SMCs do not function as expected. In addition, contrary to policy expectation, there is also widespread limited participation of community members. The following examples represent some of the challenges that confront SMCs and PTAs.

Malawi

Rose (2003, p47) argues that in Malawi, participation is “pseudo” and is based on “a consultative process whereby citizens are kept informed of decisions at a school level, and are expected to accept decisions that have already been made.”

Nigeria

In respect of Nigeria, *the United Nations Development Group Report 2006*, states that many of the SMCs are not operational. The report indicates further that about 50 percent of primary schools have no effective SMCs and that those with SMCs have only few members who are active. (UNDG RCAR, 2006).

Pakistan (Karachi)

In a survey of about 70 primary schools in Karachi, it was observed that SMCs had been established in the majority of schools but they were not functioning. According to the Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) Report, 2004, a large number of school participants in a survey stated that SMC members did not visit schools and that they had not seen a single member of the SMC in their schools. They attributed the problems confronting schools in Karachi to a lack of interest in SMC members. The report also indicated that female participation in SMC meetings was often very low. These views were captured in the CEF report with regard to three other districts in Pakistan:

Hyderabad

More than 90% of the SMCs exist only on paper and are not practically working. On the other hand, parents also lack interest in activities of the SMC and their child's academic life. Usually, parents do not even bother to collect their children's terminal report. Many parents are uneducated and belong to poor families, and therefore do not realise the importance of their children's education (p19).

Peshawar

SMCs have been formed at almost every school in the district, but their performance cannot be judged, as they remain non-functional (p.23).

Multan

SMC mostly remained inactive and only seemed to be functioning on paper. The members, especially parents, remain unaware about their specific role in

those committees. Committee members seldom gather to discuss education matters (p27).

There was evidence of fraud and abuse of power by heads of educational institutions under the watch of some SMCs in Karachi. There were also complaints about teachers of two schools who were drawing salaries without reporting for their jobs; misappropriation in the procurement of furniture; and the misuse of school property. This signifies that the watchdog role of the community and its demand for accountability cannot always be assumed.

Ghana

A Ghanaweb report indicates that a school in one of the districts of Ghana had consistently scored zero percent in the BECE over the past eight years (Ghanaweb, 2009). It took a new DCE, who was appointed for the area in 2009, to call a stakeholders' meeting of the chiefs, elders, townsfolk and the school, to discuss the consistently dismal performance. It was noted that the initiative came from the DCE, who had been in office for barely four months, and not the SMC or the community leadership. Clearly, if there was an SMC it was not functioning properly, living up to the situation in which many rural communities find themselves.

Appendix 4

SMC/PTA ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

What is the School Management Committee (SMC)?

The SMC is a committee designated under the Ghana Education Service Act of 1994.

It is a school – community based institution aimed at strengthening community participation and mobilization for education delivery.

What is the membership?

The SMC is a representation of the entire school – community of a particular school or cluster of schools. The school community, therefore, becomes its constituency.

Who forms the School Management Committee?

- District / Municipal Director of Education or representative as an ex – officio member.
- Headmaster / Headteacher
- District / Municipal Assembly representative (usually Assembly Person)
- Unit Committee representative
- Representative appointed by the Chief of the town / village.
- Representative from Educational Unit (If the school is a Unit school)
- Two members of teaching staff (JSS and Primary, one each)
- Past Pupils' Association representative
- Representative from the PTA
- Co – opted members to perform specific functions (optional).

What is the Gender Equity approach?

Communities are encouraged to work towards getting women to constitute, at least, one – third of the membership.

How long is one a member of SMC?

- Executive: three – year term, eligible for only one additional three – year term.
- Chairman: elected for a one year term only.
- Failure to attend ordinary or executive meetings for three consecutive times disqualifies a member from SMC. In such circumstances, he/she should be replaced by the appropriate authority or group of representation.

What are the powers and functions of SMC?

- Control the general policy of the school.
- Avoid encroaching upon the authority of the headmaster or Headteacher.

- Presents periodic reports to Director General of Education and DEOC through the DDE.
- Ensure the premises of school are kept in a sanitarily and structurally safe condition, generally in a good state of repair.
- Help the headmaster/Headteacher in solving conflicts and report to the DEO.
- Refer serious disciplinary cases to the District Director for action.
- Negotiate for land for school projects; e.g., school farm, football field.

When does SMC meet?

- General meeting once a term,
- Emergency meetings as needed.

How many members will form a quorum?

- Five members
- Voting is by majority decision.

How is SMC funded?

- PTA funds (raised through contribution by parents)
- Donations from NGOs.
- Grants / Gifts

Who is disqualified to be an executive member?

- An ex-convict who has not been pardoned.
- A person who is declared bankrupt.
- A person of unsound mind.

Parent Teacher Association

What is the Parent / Teacher Association (PTA)?

The PTA is an association of parents and teachers in a particular school or cluster of schools.

- Non –governmental
- Non – sectarian
- Non – partisan
- Non – commercial

What is the membership?

Parents, guardians and teachers who are interested in children's education.

Who are the Executive Members?

- Chairman
- Vice chairman
- Secretary (teacher)
- Financial secretary (parent)
- Treasurer (parent)
- 1st Committee member (parent)
- 2nd Committee member (parent)
- 3rd Committee member (headmaster)
- School Welfare Officer (ex-officio member)

Where there is a cluster of schools, all headmasters / headteachers should be members.

How long is one a member of PTA?

- Member – parent: As long as one has a child in the school.
- Executive member: 2 – year term, eligible for two terms only.

What are the powers and functions of PTA?

- Assist in school maintenance and the repair of infrastructure
- See to children / teachers' welfare; e.g., provision of accommodation, school textbooks.
- See to performance of children.
- Visit school regularly to monitor the children's performance.
- Help in solving schools' problems.
- Help maintain discipline by reporting lateness, truancy, etc., to school authorities.
- Avoid encroaching upon the authority of the headmaster/Headteacher.
- Cooperate with other organizations /agencies having common interests regarding quality education.

When does PTA met?

- General meetings at least once a term.
- Emergency meeting at the request of Chairman or headmaster/Headteacher.

How many members will form a quorum?

- General meeting: one half of membership.
- Executive meeting: five members.

How is PTA funded?

- Members' contributions
- Voluntary contributions from stakeholders

- NGOs.
- Community.

Who is disqualified to be an executive member?

- People of unsound mind.
- An ex-convict who has not been pardoned.

Source: Ghana Education Service, *SMC/PTA Handbook*, (2001, p.9-11)

Selection of Respondents

Table 1: Categories of Respondents

Category		CBS site	Kuku site		Total
The Community	PTA executive	2	2		4
	PTA members	3	3		6
	SMC executive	3	3		6
	SMC members	3	3		6
	MEOC (incl. MCE)			4	4
	Wider community	3	3		6
The School	Heads of schools	1	2		3
	Teachers	3	3		6
Education Mgt.	MDE			1	1
	CS			2	2
	MEPT			4	4
Total		18	19	11	48

PTA = parent teacher association
 SMC = school management committee
 MDE = municipal director of education
 CS = circuit supervisor
 MEPT = Municipal Education Planning Team
 MEOC = Municipal Education Oversight Committee

Source: the author.

Table 2: Research Framework

Research questions	Methods/ Instruments	Data Sources
1. In what ways have communities participated in school governance?	• Documentary study	PTA/SMC minutes and files; school reports to the Municipal Education Office; and SPAM reports
3 How have community stakeholder groups understood their new roles in decentralised governance of schools and how have these been interpreted and executed?	• One-to-one interviews	Head teachers, teachers, PTA/SMC members, parents, MEPT members and community members
4 What challenges emerge from such engagement with schools?		
4. What factors shape community-school relations under decentralised management of schools and how do these factors affect community participation in education?	• One-to-one interviews	Community members, PTA/SMC/ MDE, head teachers, teachers, MEPT, MEOC and parents.
5. How have accountability and leadership at the school and community levels enhanced or limited the governance of schools?	• One-to-one interviews	Head teachers, teachers, PTA/SMC, parents, municipal assembly and community members

Source: the author.

**UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK
RESEARCH ETHICS CHECKLIST**

The Standards apply to all research undertaken, whether empirical or not. When planning non-empirical work, you will need to consider how specific standards and guidelines may best be applied to your research approach, processes and potential impact. Where there is no equivalent for non-empirical work, tick 'not applicable', explaining briefly why in the comment box for each standard.

Standard 1: Safeguard the interests and rights of those involved or affected by the research

1.1 Will you consider the well-being, wishes and feelings, and best interests of those involved or affected?

✓ **Yes**

No

N/A

1.2 Will written and signed consent be obtained without coercion? Will participants be informed of their right to refuse or to withdraw at any time?

✓ **Yes**

No

N/A

1.3 Will the purposes and processes of the research be fully explained, using alternative forms of communication where necessary and making reference to any implications for participants of time, cost and the possible influence of the outcomes?

✓ **Yes**

No

N/A

1.4 Where covert research is proposed, has a case been made and brought to the attention of the School Research Governance Committee and approval sought from the relevant external professional ethical committee?

Yes

No

✓ **N/A**

1.5 Does the proposal include procedures to verify material with respondents and offer feedback on findings?

Yes

✓ **No**

N/A

1.6 Will conditional anonymity and confidentiality be offered?

Yes

✓ **No**

N/A

1.7 Have you identified the appropriate person to whom disclosures that involve danger to the participant or others, must be reported?

✓ **Yes**

No

N/A

Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above

Standard 2: Ensure the safety of researchers undertaking fieldwork

2.1 Have you identified any physical or social risks to yourself in undertaking the fieldwork?

Yes

✓ **No**

N/A

2.2 Will you have access to an administrator who will keep a diary of any fieldwork visits and your whereabouts?

Yes

No

✓ **N/A**

2.3 Have you considered how you will collect your material and whether this could make you vulnerable?

✓ **Yes**

No

N/A

Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above

Standard 3: Uphold the highest possible standards of research practices including in research design, collection and storage of research material, analysis, interpretation and writing

3.1 Will literature be used appropriately, acknowledged, referenced and where relevant, permission sought from the author(s)?

✓ **Yes**

No

N/A

3.2 Is the research approach well suited to the nature and focus of the study?

✓ **Yes**

No

N/A

3.3 Will the material be used to address existing or emerging research question(s) only?

✓ **Yes**

No

N/A

3.4 Does the research design include means of verifying findings and interpretations?

✓ **Yes**

No

N/A

3.5 Where research is externally funded, will agreement with sponsors be reached on reporting and intellectual property rights?

Yes

No

✓ **N/A**

3.6 Will plans be made to enable archiving of the research data?

Yes

No

✓ **N/A**

Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above

Standard 4: Consider the impact of the research and its use or misuse for those involved in the study and other interested parties.

4.1 Have the short and long term consequences of the research been considered from the different perspectives of participants, researchers, policy-makers and, where relevant, funders?

✓ **Yes**

No

N/A

4.2 Have the costs of the research to participants or their institutions/services and any possible compensation been considered?

✓ **Yes**

No

N/A

4.3 Has information about support services that might be needed as a consequence of any possible unsettling effects of the research itself been identified?

Yes

No

✓ **N/A**

4.4 Are there plans flexible enough to take appropriate action should your project have an effect on the individuals or institutions/services involved?

Yes

No

✓ **N/A**

Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above

Standard 5: Ensure appropriate external professional ethical committee approval is granted where relevant

5.1 Have colleagues/supervisors been invited to comment on your research proposal?

Yes

No

✓ **N/A**

5.2 Have any sensitive ethical issues been raised with the School Research Governance Committee and comments sought?

Yes

No

✓ **N/A**

5.3 Has the relevant external professional ethical committee been identified?

Yes

No

✓ **N/A**

5.4 Have the guidelines from that professional committee been used to check the proposed research?

Yes

No

✓ **N/A**

Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above

Standard 6: Ensure relevant legislative and policy requirements are met.

6.1 Do you need an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check?

Yes

No

✓ **N/A**

6.2 Are you certain about implications arising from legislation? If not has contact been made with the designated officer?

✓ **Yes**

No

Please add further comments if helpful to clarify the above