

Strengthening Accountability and Participation: School Self-Assessment in Namibia

School Self-Assessments

Communities around the world are being encouraged to participate in the work and management of their schools. This participation may involve school boards, management committees, financial and in-kind contributions, and school improvement projects. In six northern regions of Namibia, communities participate in developing and implementing school improvement plans. A key tool of such plans is the school self-assessment (SSA) system.

SSA is an innovative approach that

- encourages 360 degree accountability: school to parents; parents to school; school to circuit and region; and region and circuit to school;
- informs curriculum revision and policy analysis at all educational levels;
- fosters school improvement by developing local capacity for thoughtful practice and analysis;
- is an active learning method that involves parents and teachers in the whole improvement process;
- offers supervisors, teachers, and parents opportunities to discuss ways to improve school quality; and
- can be used to measure the impact of donor projects.

Parents Participate in Namibian Schools

Why don't more parents participate in schools? One reason is the strong belief that they cannot offer any meaningful support. In the Kavango Region of northern Namibia, parents and teachers are proving this assumption wrong. They are assessing school performance and identifying activities for a school improvement plan (SIP).

Mrs. Shipapo, the SIP resource teacher, and Mr. Kwando, a parent, review a bar graph that depicts answers to school self-assessment (SSA) questions. Mr. Kwando explains that the score for the category "school climate" include rankings of such statements as "the school promotes learner achievement" and "learners and parents report the school is a caring place."

Parents go on to discuss how they can help ensure a good school climate. They decide to work more closely with the principal to get their children to school on time every day. The parents, teachers, principal, and resource teacher review the other ten SSA categories in the same way.

By the end of the meeting, they have many ideas for collective activities to improve their school. On the way out, one parent tells Mrs. Shipapo that the "picture of the bars" is easier to understand than "all those written words."



Four Summaries of Assessment Findings

1. **The School Report** provides summary ratings of 11 indicators for each school.
2. **The School Comparative Report** compares school and observer rankings.
3. **The Circuit Report** compares school rankings to regional averages.
4. **The Region Summary** compares school rankings in different circuits to identify regional problems.

SSAs in Namibia

The SSA system in Namibia was developed to respond to the Ministry of Education's need to monitor and evaluate education results in spite of its chronic lack of funds. Previously, the ministry used biannual sample-based studies by the National Institute for Education Development. Though these studies provided useful insights, they were too infrequent, small, and narrowly focused.

The Minister of Education wanted to adopt the SSA system used in the Seychelles that provided timely and ongoing information from all schools, including their perceived strengths and weaknesses. The USAID BES II Project provided the ministry with technical assistance to develop the system.

Purpose and Outcomes of SSAs

Namibia's reforms to improve school quality are based on two pillars:

1. community participation in developing school improvement plans
2. effective classroom practices based on active learning and continuous assessment

Active learning and continuous assessment challenge classroom teachers and school directors to think differently and acquire new sets of skills. These practices also require substantial and continuous engagement at the school level to develop common norms and expectations.

The centerpiece of Namibia's school reforms are school improvement plans (SIPs). Developing these plans entails annual collaboration between school staff, parents, and supervisors. Their goal is to sustain "schools with norms of continuous improvement" (Harris and Hopkins 2000). Achieving it requires support from circuit support teams of supervisors and resource teachers. The teams facilitate the development of SIPs and provide teacher training.

SSA is another core tool that helps communities and parents contribute constructively to educational improvement.

SSA Components

Teacher/Principal Self-Assessments

These self-assessment forms allow teachers and principals to review their strengths and weaknesses. The information is not disclosed: only identified priority training needs are shared with the rest of the school.

School Self-Assessments

These assessments are developed through a discussion-based process, guided by the SSA, that rates school practices and identifies areas for improvement. The discussion focuses on ranking 11 key factors on a scale of 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent). These factors are

- school climate;
- school management;
- professional development;
- school planning;
- teacher attitude;
- classroom management
- learner-centered education;
- continuous assessment;
- school support for parent involvement;
- parent activities; and
- educational system inputs.

Each factor has 8–10 specific indicators stated in simple language, such as high learning goals are set for students, teachers are respectful of students, and parents are welcome in the school. Combined indicator scores provide a single ranking for each factor. These are publicized in the school report (see Annex, School Climate Sample).

Observer Assessments

The circuit team of inspectors or resource teachers uses the same indicators to provide an independent school assessment that is based on a set of objective criteria. The process provides a degree of quality control and an objective measurement of school quality (see Annex, Bukalo P. School Summary).

Circuit Team Self-Assessments

The circuit team assesses its own performance and capacity, identifying its training and support needs. These assessments are summarized and shared with regional education officers, who obtain overviews from quarterly reports on the team’s school support activities (see Annex, Needs Assessment).

Results

The SSA system provides positive results for all stakeholders:

- Teachers and principals can identify the professional capacity they need to master.
- Schools and communities learn how to improve their schools. They can measure improvements and compare their assessments to those of other schools and the inspector’s assessment.
- Parents know what specific actions are needed to improve the school.
- Circuit teams recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the schools and identify priority needs for support.
- Regional education officers know how circuit teams are performing, how schools in each region are progressing, how schools compare with each other, and what circuit teams and schools need.

Keys to Success

1. A significant amount of training is needed at the school and circuit level to complete the first self-assessment and school improvement plan.
2. The analysis must be available and easy to understand at the school and circuit level.
3. The purpose of the assessment must be constructive, not punitive. It must also be as anonymous as possible. Only broad summary measures should go to the circuit and regional director. No individual or school should be identifiable for criticism.
4. Circuit supervisors must conduct comparative “quality control” assessments that are used in school discussions.
5. Schools and communities must develop their own norms and standards and eventually achieve consensus with others.

Advantages of SSA

The SSA system provides a low-cost and highly participatory way to track performance and improvement in all schools. SSA enables parents and community members to offer support to schools and facilitates substantive collaboration between parents and teachers. It helps create meaningful and common standards of performance and expectations.

SSA is also a useful tool for regional and circuit managers, and it promotes professional development for teachers, principals, and supervisors. The system provides a systematic and objective measure of classroom practice, including a checklist regularly used by teachers.

SSA Challenges

Reports that are used to judge and penalize underperforming schools may provide an incentive for false reporting. However, false reporting was not found to be a problem in Namibia. Nevertheless, outside observation and quality control are required. Honest self-reflection is difficult, providing data and standards that are not as “hard” as those of outside evaluations or certification criteria.

Acknowledgements

This paper was written for EQUIP2 by John Gillies (AED), 2004.

References

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Appendix. Sample Tools

Category 1: School Management and Leadership School Climate

A. Indicators	4	3	2	1	Total
1. The school community shows respect for teachers, learners, parents, and the principal.		X			
2. Principal and teachers regularly express confidence in learners' ability to succeed.	X				
3. The school promotes learner achievement through regular awards, announcements, and activities.				X	
4. Learners and parents report that the school is a caring place		X			
5. Teachers demonstrate that they are dedicated to the school and to the learners.		X			
6. Principals and teachers talk to learners outside of class, demonstrating concern.		X			
7. School has displays of learner and school achievement.				X	
8. The principal is dedicated to the general success of the school.	X				
9. School facilities and premises are clean and orderly.			X		
10. Principal and teachers respect and adhere to rules on tardiness, attendance, and class schedules.			X		
Total (sum of each column, then add points in the TOTAL column)	8	12	4	2	26
Summary Score – School Climate (divide total by 10)					26/10 = 2.6

B. Discussion of School Climate	
What aspects make us most proud?	What aspects do we need to work on the most?
<p>The teachers are very dedicated to the learners and the school. They are highly motivated, and often stay after school to help learners with problems. The teachers know the family situation of the learners and try to help. The teachers really care about the learners.</p> <p>Because of the principal's work, the school has excellent relations with the community.</p> <p>The community considers the school to be an important community resource.</p>	<p>We all need to work harder on workplace discipline, particularly in teacher and principal attendance and tardiness. Too often, educators arrive late or miss class entirely, reducing time for learners.</p> <p>We also need to work harder at keeping up the school's orderly and clean appearance. Sometimes, it becomes messy.</p> <p>We do not have a regular award program to recognize learner excellence.</p>

C. Actions we can take: What three things can we do this year that will most improve our school climate?

- Principal: Establish an award program.
- Teachers: Do not be tardy more than once a month.
- Parents: Help to clean the school.
- Learners: Help to keep the classroom clean.

D. Assistance Needed: What do we need from the circuit support team?

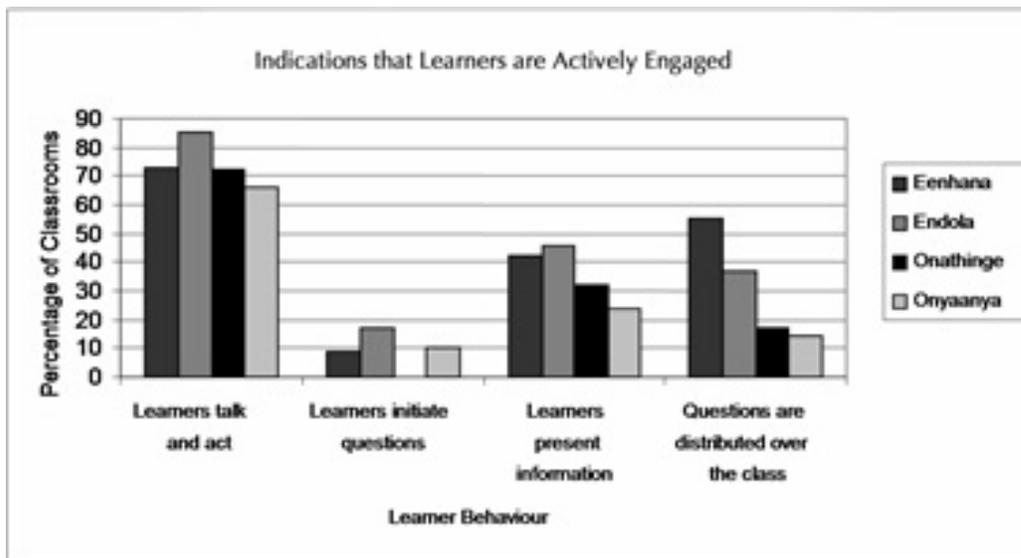
Ideas and assistance in setting up a learner-recognition program that includes awards and activities.

Sample 1. School Ratings Comparison with Supervisor Ratings

Bukalo P. School Summary

Indicator	School Rating	Observer rating
School Climate	3.1	2
Management Practices	2.9	3
Prof. Development	3.8	2
School Planning	3	3
Parent Involvement	2.7	2
Parent Activities	3.2	2
Teacher Attitude	4	3
Classroom Management	3.8	4
LCE	3.7	2.3
Continuous Assessment	4	2.8
Outside Support	3.8	3

Sample 2. Comparing Teaching-Learning Practices in Different Circuits



EQUIP2: Educational Policy, Systems Development, and Management is one of three USAID-funded Leader with Associate Cooperative Agreements under the umbrella heading Educational Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP). As a Leader with Associates mechanism, EQUIP2 accommodates buy-in awards from USAID bureaus and missions to support the goal of building educational quality in the national, sub-national, and cross-community levels.

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EQUIP2 is funded by the United States Agency for International Development
Cooperative Agreement No. GDG-A-00-03-00008-00

