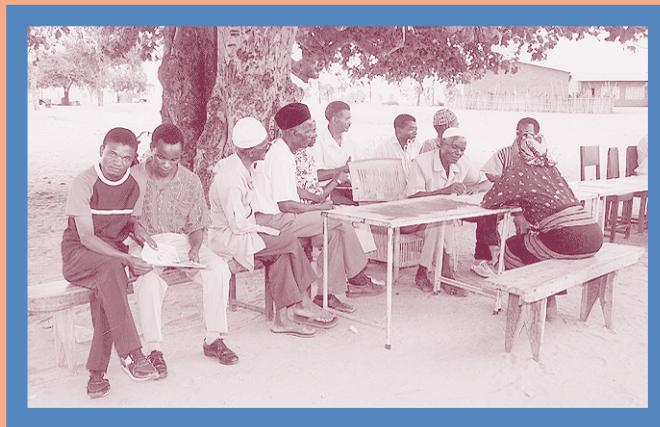


Where Policy Hits the Ground

Policy Implementation Processes in Malawi and Namibia



JOYCE WOLF

GRACE LANG

L.L. BEKETT MOUNT

DIANE VANBELLE-PROUTY



Where Policy Hits the Ground

Policy Implementation Processes in Malawi and Namibia

JOYCE WOLF

GRACE LANG

L.L. BEKETT MOUNT

DIANE VANBELLE-PROUTY

U.S. Agency for International Development ■ Bureau for Africa ■ Office of Sustainable Development

Division of Human Resources and Democracy ■ SD Technical Paper No. 95

— 1999 —

Contents

Acknowledgments	5
1. Introduction	7
2. Resistance	11
Resistance Due to Cultural Values	11
Resistance Due to Shifts in Power	22
Resistance Due to Professional Values	31
<i>Table 1: Response to Policy According to Position in the System.....</i>	<i>39</i>
3. Variation in Context	41
Rural–Urban Variations	41
One-Size-Fits-All Policies	45
Conclusions	55
4. Communication	57
Structure of Communication	57
<i>Table 2: Lines of Communication in Malawi and Namibia</i>	<i>58</i>
Communication to Whom	58
Types of Communication	63

<i>Table 3: Methods of Policy Communication</i>	63
What is Communicated	73
Conclusions	80
5. Conclusion	83
Multiple Barriers to Implementation	83
<i>Table 4: Distribution of Pupils and Teachers by Standard in a Malawian School</i>	85
Summary	88
<i>Table 5: Barriers to Implementation</i>	89
Appendix: Methodology	91
<i>Table 6: Number of Interviews Conducted</i>	92
References	93

Acknowledgments

Many people and offices contributed to this report. Julie Owen-Rea, education and training officer for USAID’s Africa Bureau, provided leadership, support, and guidance for this study. The Africa Bureau’s Office of Sustainable Development funded the effort.

The ministries of education in Malawi and Namibia helped select policies to examine as well as the areas of the countries to conduct research in. Many regional, district, and school officials and community members patiently answered questions and provided opinions.

The Academy for Educational Development (AED) supported the research conducted in Malawi and Namibia through the Support for African Research and Analysis (SARA) project. AED supported the editing, design, and production of the report through the Research and Reference Services (R&RS) and Advancing Basic Education and Literacy (ABEL) projects. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) provided staff support through the Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) project for planning the research, analyzing the data, and writing the report.

Julianne Gilmore and many others helpfully commented on the text.

Photos on the cover and page 27 are by Janet Robb, Creative Associates International, Inc. (CAII), for the Malawi GABLE SMC. All other photos are by Joyce Wolf.

1. Introduction

In recent years, large amounts of time, energy, and money have been devoted to supporting the development of policies addressing primary educational reform in sub-Saharan African countries. Many new policies have been issued as countries struggle to transform their societies through educational change. Yet many, or even most, of those policies that took so much effort to produce have never been implemented in a manner resembling what was envisioned. Psacharopoulos writes that “policy outcomes fall far short of matching expectations, mainly because of insufficient, or the absence of, implementation” (Abstract 1990).

Rather than beginning this research with a theory that explains why the implementation of policies is so difficult to achieve, the starting point was to collect data from which to gain a better understanding. The two countries where the research was conducted, Malawi and Namibia, have each recently experienced far-reaching changes in their governments.¹ In both countries a large number of new primary education policies have been issued as a key component of their reform processes. The ministries of education in both countries, because of their interest in understanding what is happening to those policies, helped

¹Namibia obtained independence in 1990 and held its first democratic elections in 1991. Malawi, after almost thirty years of dictatorship, held its first democratic elections in 1994.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

select the specific policies that were examined in this research. Staff in the central ministry, regional and district offices, schools, and communities were interviewed over a two month period in each country.² One of the first goals of this study was to present a snapshot of the policy implementation process in sub-Saharan Africa.

Research abounds on the topic of implementing educational policy. Much of it, however, focuses on either the process of policy formation or on the effects of policy change, not on the process of implementation, especially where it reaches the ground in district offices, schools, or communities. “Policy,” as discussed in most of the literature, generally refers to the grand, sweeping policy objectives of governments such as “universal primary education” that are most often considered (e.g., Craig 1990; Grindle 1991; Psacharopoulos 1990; Rondinelli 1994). General developmental objectives such as universal primary education are vague, because they do not spell out how they are to be achieved. This research focused instead on specific policies issued by governments as a means for moving toward these larger, overarching policy goals. The focus on particular policies with more specifically defined objectives allowed a closer examination of what was intended and what occurred. In Namibia, this study examined policies making English the official language for the school system, banning the use of corporal punishment in schools, setting a target ratio for learners to teachers, and strengthening the role of school boards. In Malawi, the study examined policies allowing girls who had become pregnant while in

²See appendix for a description of the methodology.

school to return to school after having their babies, regulating the amount of repetition in primary school, setting a target ratio for pupils to teachers, and strengthening the role of school committees.

Many studies have concluded that the key ingredient to successful policy implementation is the participation of a wide range of stakeholders in the policy formation process. However, complex forces are at work in most countries, and policies are not always created in such a participatory fashion. Nor, for that matter, do many policies of long term benefit to society have the support of the majority of society in the short term. This research is grounded in the belief that there are additional barriers to successful policy implementation, specific areas of difficulty that may vary in the details from country to country and that can be recognized and addressed to improve all implementation processes. For example, the role of how and to whom policies are communicated emerged from the data as a major factor in successful implementation (see chapter 4). In addition, variations in factors such as population density, availability of transportation, and literacy of parents can make a policy enacted in some areas of the country impossible to implement in others (see chapter 3).

Opposition to policy implementation is most often examined as part of a political process, of groups “winning” or “losing” a struggle to implement policies that will most benefit them. The reasons for opposition are not, however, always linked to winning or losing power or resources. They may also spring from cultural or social differences. In addition to examining opposition to policy implementation based on political processes, this research also explores sources

Where Policy Hits the Ground

of resistance stemming from social and cultural perceptions due to ethnicity, class, educational level, professional expectations, and geography (see chapter 2). Because of the wide range of topics addressed by the policies under study as well as the wide range of social contexts the two countries provide, this report identified resistance to new policies (and its effects) in different parts of the education system.

This is a study of barriers to policy implementation—logistical, political, cultural, and social. It is also a study of how new policies and the context in which they are intended to operate can interact to create some of these barriers. A better understanding of the processes by which new policies are implemented can help governments support them better.

2. Resistance

The assumption by some governments in sub-Saharan Africa that policies need only be proclaimed to be implemented reflects their centralized, authoritarian beliefs. This chapter explores the types of resistance policies encounter and the differing effects on implementation processes according to where in the system the opposition is located.

Resistance Due to Cultural Values

“Cultural values” are generally evoked to explain why a program or policy has failed to have the expected effect. But cultural values existed prior to the creation of the policy and, to varying degrees, policymakers were aware of them. It is not clear, then, why governments do not more often anticipate the resistance that different perceptions of a policy will create and use communication, training, or social marketing techniques to head some of it off. In some cases, it could be that the policymakers are focused upon the design of the policy and the politics of its creation, and do not see its implementation as part of their role. It might also be that while the possibility of resistance is acknowledged, it is not given enough priority to commit the resources necessary to overcome it. In the following examples, the cultural values of the central ministries are different from the values of teachers or community members in ways that affect the implementation of specific policies. The resistance springs from

Where Policy Hits the Ground

cultural values, not the traditional values that vary among ethnic groups, but rather cultural values introduced by colonial powers that have been accepted as part of the national culture.

EXAMPLE 1: PREGNANCY POLICY IN MALAWI

In the late 1980s and early 1990s a group of Malawian women with political and institutional power, the National Commission of Women, attempted to catalyze changes that would improve the lives of women. At a 1990 workshop, the group asked the education ministry to reexamine its pregnancy policies: “The incidence of female students dropping out of school due to pregnancies is high, and after dismissal these girls have no chance of being



Teachers in Malawi have traditionally stressed appearance and high moral standards.

readmitted into the school system. The Ministry of Education and Culture should review this policy and readmit these students once during their education” (National Commission on Women in Development 1990). Three years later, the ministry did issue a policy allowing girls to be readmitted to school after having a child. Government support for the policy was strong because it had been sug-

gested by a politically powerful group, crafted through the joint efforts of a wide range of Malawian institutions, and well received by the international and donor community.

For decades the primary education system in Malawi has been characterized by high dropout rates, which means that relatively few pupils reach the final standards. Of those few that do complete all eight standards, only a small percentage are selected to attend secondary school. Still more students drop out of secondary school. Teachers in Malawi are required to have completed secondary school. Given the tiny percentage of Malawians who manage to do so and the type of skills, such as fluency in English, taught in

MALAWI PREGNANCY POLICY

The result of the government review is that:

a) A school girl who is pregnant [shall] be withdrawn from school for one academic year and be re-admitted upon application as long as there is assurance of safe custody of the child. Such opportunity shall be given once in a girls's [sic] education.

b) a school boy who is responsible for a school girl's pregnancy shall be withdrawn for one academic year and readmitted on application.

Following the review all heads of institutions are requested to reflect the new policy in their recommendations.

—*Secretary for Education, December 16, 1993*

Where Policy Hits the Ground

secondary school, it is small wonder that teachers tend to see themselves, whatever their ethnic backgrounds, as educated elites. The values within this community of elites in Malawi often reflect colonial values—promoted for three decades by President Banda—that emphasize the importance of appearance and high “moral” standards. For many teachers, not permanently expelling girls who become pregnant contradicted what they viewed as basic standards.

When the new pregnancy policy was first issued, the immediate response of some district personnel and many head teachers was to resist implementation by not passing on information about the policy to schools, teachers within schools, or communities (Wolf 1995). By the time this research was conducted, head teachers’ attitudes had begun to change, but a number of teachers still opposed the policy:

- *For ages we’ve believed when a girl gets pregnant at school she is considered an outcast. Teachers think that she is cheap. The other boys, and even the teachers, will want to taste her.*
- *We shouldn’t let them back. The girls will be remembering what they were doing in the past and not attend their lessons. She is bad for school.*
- *I feel that somehow the lady [a girl who has been pregnant] is impolite. She feels now we are the same [age] group. If a teacher tells her to do something she doesn’t take it to the bottom of her heart. The men teachers’ eyes will be full of the girl because she is already experienced.*
- *I haven’t experienced it [a young mother returning to school], but I feel that if they come back they encourage the others. They don’t fear sex. She tells the*

others, “I have experienced sex,” and the others want to also. The girls are weak-minded you know.

- *In some schools they believe that [the policy] gives the impression that girls can misbehave and still come back. They disturb the whole system.*

In contrast to how girls who become pregnant were perceived by many teachers, central and regional personnel and community members do not usually see the girls as immoral or a potential behavioral problem for the school. A regional official said:

- *Most parents don’t know about the pregnancy policy.... The radio transmission does not make it here. The teachers and headmasters know it but don’t tell the parents.... A headmaster looks at accepting the same girl back as not very positive. That particular pupil will promote indiscipline.... They see the girl who misbehaves as their sexual morality is weak. But I myself see these girls as being leaders for others. ...Given the chance, having gone through that experience, she will work hard to obtain school.*

A school committee member said:

- *It is a good idea to have young mothers in school. They did it accidentally, not by plan, so it’s better to let them come in so they can make a better future. They become more careful.*

Community support for allowing girls who have become pregnant to return to school was very strong, as everyone had a relative who had been forced to leave school due to pregnancy, and most communities do not condemn girls who become pregnant. Ministry officials supported the policy in many cases

Where Policy Hits the Ground

because of exposure to development arguments about the importance of girls' education. The failure of the teachers to hold a similar position does not match Craig's (1990) findings that "...since teachers normally live in the community in which they teach, since they are more inclined than the ministry to consider local preferences 'rational,' and since they may be observed more closely and critically by their communities than by school inspectors or district officers, teachers often side with the local population when conflicts arise." In this case the ministry and communities agreed on the new policy, while the school personnel resisted the change.

The ministry helped overcome the teachers' resistance through use of the media and a social mobilization campaign, both of which directly disseminated information about the policy to communities. The teachers, caught between the support for change from both their administrative superiors and their communities, began to change their attitudes. As girls began returning to school after the birth of babies, the girls rarely created the problems feared by the teachers and frequently did well in school. The teachers often recognized that their initial resistance had been overcome:

- *We made history. A girl had a baby, came back for standard 8, and got accepted to secondary school.*
- *What we have experienced is that after giving birth the girl is just like the other girls. She is not a problem. They become good children.*
- *Last year there was one [returning young mother] who was selected to go to secondary school.... She learned a lesson, she became more serious. She was*

more disciplined than before. She was never absent. She is a good example.

- *We have had a good number of them [girls who returned after giving birth].*
- *We had one at this school that got selected. We celebrated. They seem to love school more than before.*

Not all girls who became pregnant returned to school. Many other obstacles, such as finding child care, stood in their way. But the symbolic value of the policy is important. And the history of its implementation shows that a committed government can overcome cultural resistance to reforms.

EXAMPLE 2: DISCIPLINE POLICY IN NAMIBIA

Before independence in 1990, corporal punishment was a regular feature of school and classroom practice in Namibia. The 1980 National Education Act allowed corporal punishment and provided guidelines for how to administer it. Corporal punishment was used not only for serious rule violations, but also for maintaining simple order in the classroom, stopping mischievous behavior, correcting bad manners, even punishing students who failed tests. Teachers reported that corporal punishment had been used too much in the past. Learners were afraid of teachers, and many left school for fear of punishment. Some teachers said that they had heard of a teacher who had beaten a student to death and, while education officials insisted that this was a rumor, the fact that teachers found it to be within the realm of possibility indicates how serious a problem corporal punishment had become.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

NAMIBIA CORPORAL PUNISHMENT POLICY

1. In a letter from the office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice the attention of the Ministry of Education and Culture was drawn to the Supreme Court's ruling on corporal punishment. The paragraph in question reads as follows:

I have the honour to inform you that on the 5th of April, 1991, the Supreme Court found/ordered inter alia that, the infliction or imposition of corporal punishment upon any person by both judicial and education authorities is indeed unconstitutional, unlawful and as such in conflict with the provisions of Article 8 of the Namibian Constitution.

2. According to this ruling the infliction of corporal punishment in government schools is punishable before the court. The Ministry regards the continuation of this unlawful practice in schools a serious matter. An offender commits an offence which not only makes him guilty in terms of the Supreme Court's ruling, but also of misconduct under the Public Service Act.

3. Headmasters are kindly asked to fully inform their staff on this.

—*Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Culture, April 26, 1991*

Resistance

Respect for human rights and human dignity are basic elements of the Namibian constitution. Many leaders of the new government were educated during the war for independence outside of Namibia, in countries where little tolerance for corporal punishment existed, and the leaders were committed to ending the practice in Namibia. Several teachers expressed a sense that some new policies, especially the discipline policy, were "...foreign ideas being brought into the system." One teacher pointed out that, "The change in thinking required for complete abolishment of corporal punishment is too foreign an idea for many Namibians to accept. You cannot implement a first world idea in a tenth world country."

A circular abolishing corporal punishment was sent to all Namibian schools in 1990. The policy change was accompanied by a great deal of attention in the news media. Within a year, a ruling by the chief justice of the courts was passed down, which stated that corporal punishment is a violation of the Namibian constitution, and forbade any administrative organs of the state to administer it. Because schools and teachers are organs of the state, the ruling applied, and the legal implications of the ruling were communicated to schools via a circular in 1991.

For the first few years, there was much resistance and resentment on the part of school personnel and parents, who thought that use of corporal punishment was the only way to maintain control and discipline. One inspector said, "Teachers are not keen to try alternatives because they have an idea already in their mind that it should be corporal punishment. You'll find five

Where Policy Hits the Ground

principals in this area who say, ‘You only hit. That’s the only punishment.’ Alternatives are not considered punishment.” Research has suggested that the greatest effects on teachers’ behavior are their own experiences while attending school, and as Namibian teachers’ own school experiences included corporal punishment, it continues to provide a template for them on managing students.

Not only was corporal punishment deeply entrenched in school practice, Namibians from all parts of the country emphatically defended its use as part of their culture and their approach to disciplining their own children. One school board member said “The Bible even says to beat a child. But we must obey the law. Parents are encouraged to beat their own children and not to get the school, teachers, or school board involved.” Teachers said that “The parents say, ‘Don’t call me when my child misbehaves. Just beat my child,’ or that “We hold parent meetings...they want the whip,” or “The parents want corporal punishment. The children are beaten at home.”

Schools tried to find ways to circumvent the policy: one teacher gave permission to the class captains to beat their classmates if they were noisy; some schools allowed head teachers to beat students; and other schools administered corporal punishment to any student whose parents had signed over permission to do so. In early 1992, nearly two years after the policy was first issued, newspaper accusations surfaced that corporal punishment was still being administered in Namibian schools. Ministry officials readily admit that their expectation of a rapid change in teacher behavior was unrealistic. The ministry resisted pressure from teachers to reinstate corporal punishment, and

instead began a broad information campaign to make all Namibians aware of why the policy was changed and to provide teachers with alternatives. The ministry published a booklet entitled *Discipline from Within: Alternatives to Corporal Punishment*, and embarked on a national tour of schools to promote and encourage discussion of these alternatives.

Teachers continue to be unsure what constitutes corporal punishment (see chapter 4). However, the government's campaign is beginning to change attitudes about discipline. Teachers reported:

- *The principal at our school attended a workshop on discipline and has committed the school to a no corporal punishment policy.*
- *Teachers here know that they are not allowed to beat. They make learners water plants as an alternative. In the past they might have beat a learner if he failed a test. Not they might make him rewrite the test.*
- *At first we were not convinced. Now we believe. It is not good to have learners afraid of the teachers. If the teacher is with a stick in the class the child will only watch the stick.*
- *There is no corporal punishment at this school. We are afraid to use it and are very sorry for those teachers who get caught.*

The implementation of the policy would have been easier if the pace of change had been slower. But, in a country whose government was under intense pressure to bring about broad democratic changes, tolerating practices that were vestiges of the past was unacceptable. The sense of urgency that permeated the public debate on corporal punishment changed attitudes in favor

Where Policy Hits the Ground

of abolishing it by forcing people to think about corporal punishment not just as a traditional practice but in terms of whether it suited the image of the new Namibia they were trying to build. The timing of specific policies in relationship to overarching changes in government can affect their implementation, either supporting or hindering the process.

Resistance Due to Shifts in Power

The recent advent of democracy in Malawi and Namibia has given rise to many questions about the relationships among democracy, freedom, and authority in both societies. A principal in Namibia said, “Teachers and learners have the misunderstanding that independence means to be free to do anything you want—where no one can tell you what to do.” A teacher in Malawi gave almost the same response, adding “Sometimes they just come and quarrel with the teacher, especially in these days with democracy. They just come and quarrel.”

Both Namibian and Malawian societies are caught up in an exploration of where authority rests now that the former authorities have been overturned. The following story told by a principal in Namibia captures the new types of debates concerning schooling that have become more frequent since elections.

- *A parent and child were new to this area and we enrolled the child without seeing him. But when he came he was against our school rules on personal appearance. He had dreadlocks. He and his father quoted the Constitution*

and the Rights of the Individual. The other parents and the school board were very angry. We decided to keep our rules but changed the words “must” to “should” or “needs to.” The matter is not really settled. The parent of the dreadlocked learner brought a letter from the Legal Assistance office in Windhoek talking about the freedom of culture, religion, and tradition. The father also has dreads and says it’s his culture. He’s a Methodist! We said, “No, it’s only in your house that there are dreadlocks. That’s not tradition. That’s not culture. That’s personal choice. At the next school board meeting this issue will be brought up.”

Where does authority to make decisions rest? With the Constitution or national legal standards? With the principal and teachers? With the school board? With each individual? Policies frequently contribute to defining roles, responsibilities, and rights. But when those definitions shift power away from those who have traditionally been in control, then policies frequently meet resistance.

GIRLS VS. BOYS

The full statement of the policy that allows girls to return to school after giving birth in Malawi requires that both the girl who is pregnant and the boy who is responsible, if he is a pupil, be suspended for one year. The previous practice, as no policy statement was actually ever found saying that girls should be expelled, targeted girls for what was considered to be immoral behavior, but the boys responsible for the pregnancy were generally allowed to remain in

Where Policy Hits the Ground

school. In practice, the girls' parents often referred the issue to the school committee, which was responsible for confronting the boy and his parents and negotiating a settlement. Regional, district, and school personnel and community members all seemed to agree that a schoolboy who impregnates a schoolgirl should not have to leave school. While communities welcomed the opening up of opportunities for girls who became pregnant, they did not want their boys to be penalized, whatever the policy said. Girls could become “winners,” but not if it made the boys “losers.” Teachers described what happens as:

- *I've never seen that policy working with any boy. The boy keeps on learning.*
- *If a boy impregnates a girl, he can come back to school because a boy has a powerful mind. The clever families find a way to let their boys continue school.*
- *Boys were supposed to be expelled, but through cheating they kept going on.*
- *The girl is only suspended because she is pregnant. Most parents say the same should apply to the boy. We counsel the parents on this. She can't be in class because she is sick. When she gets well she can come back. Just let the boy continue.*
- *It will pain boys more than girls, because the boy is just sitting waiting for the girl to deliver. The girl is busy doing things, but not the boy.*

The suspension of boys also appears to many teachers and parents to be in conflict with “free education,” the elimination of school fees that occurred when the new government came into power. One popular interpretation of “free education” is that no one can be kept out of school. As one teacher

said, “With the introduction of free education, the boy should continue with school.” Other policies, such as those addressing school uniforms or maximum and minimum ages of entry, have also been seen as in conflict with the meaning given to the removal of fees.

INCREASING THE COMMUNITY’S ROLE IN EDUCATION

The organization of parents into school-based bodies that support schools has been a practice in both Namibia and Malawi for several decades. The advent of democracy in both countries has revived school boards in Namibia and school committees in Malawi as a means of promoting parental involvement in education. One of the goals is to foster democratic participation in communities through decisionmaking about local schools. Another goal is to improve the schools through the active involvement of the community. Governments recognize this role, as pointed out by Nahas Angula, former minister of education in Namibia, “Community involvement will be critical to the enhancement of local schools” (*Improving the Efficiency of Educational Systems Bulletin*, Summer 1991), but governments are also interested in increasing the involvement of communities because of their ability to absorb some of the costs of schooling. In both countries, government support for enhanced roles for school boards or school committees is strong. Yet the policies designed to strengthen the communities’ roles met with resistance.

The first barrier to increased community participation has grown out of the communities’ perceptions of what they should be asked to do. In rural

Where Policy Hits the Ground

areas, parents who are subsistence farmers must leave their fields and often must travel long distances to attend meetings. In urban areas, parents who engage in wage-earning jobs must attend meetings after they have already worked all day. Given the lack of transportation in both countries, even parents in urban areas may need to walk considerable distances, sometimes in the dark, to join school board meetings.

Teachers said:

- *The parents aren't very involved. They say they are committed to finding food for themselves...and can't be bothered with school meetings. Because of the drought they are too busy to come.*
- *Parents want to be on the board but then they don't come to meetings. It's too far to go and get them if they don't come. They are not paid to be on the school board.*
- *Very few parents participate in school meetings.... One school board member asked not to be reelected.*

In addition to strains on communities due to the effort participation requires, increased democracy has created more questions about the roles community members should play. Rural communities question why they should supply labor to maintain or build their schools while urban communities are supplied with schools by the government. And, with their new voices, they also ask why their labor should be free. Teachers said:

- *With this democracy parents have the wrong idea. Previously when we had self-help they were required to come. But now they say, "Is there anything*

Resistance



Community members are asked to take time from work to attend meetings.

you are going to give us?” They say there is no free work these days. They don’t understand it is for the benefit of their community.

- *The community built huts for ten teachers. The community wanted to be paid.... Then the teachers realized it should be a food-for-work project, but the food hasn’t arrived and the community wants to repossess the houses.*

- *In the single-party system, people were willing to do self-help. Now, with the multiparty system, we were told that the government would give everything.*

- *For renovation the school board writes letters to the parents to come together and then they request that the parents help with building. But now there are problems because [the parents] say, “The government says we should get paid for working. We want mealie and chillis.”*

- *The new government said that self-help is not good. People should be paid for their work.*

Other questions about school board or school committee roles have emerged in both countries. In Malawi, the roles of the school committee and the parent–teacher associations (PTAs) have not been clearly delineated, which has

Where Policy Hits the Ground

resulted in many local-level conflicts between the two organizations that interfere with the implementation of the school committee policy. Teachers report these clashes, but no one appears to understand where the authority rests to resolve them:

- *School committee and PTA are quite similar. They sometimes collide on what they think their responsibilities are.*
- *The PTA and the school committee conflicted. Both thought it was their responsibility to collect money. So the PTA dissolved.*
- *There were clashes between the PTA and the school committee so the school committee disbanded the PTA. Here the school committee wants to be the PTA.*
- *We need a pamphlet to explain the differences [between the school committee and PTA]... . The PTA thought that they also could repair the building. They didn't know their duties. Their job is to motivate parents and to check on absenteeism.*

In Namibia, the role of the school board in relationship to the regional office's role in hiring teachers has not been made clear, which has hindered the implementation of the school board policy. Community participation through the school board is made more difficult by the ambiguous messages that have been issued by the government. Because the Namibian government perceives that it has the political as well as moral imperative to ensure that the inequities of the past do not continue into the future, government checks to community authority have been maintained or were enacted to prevent racially

or ethnically based hiring practices. Consequently, school boards are told they have the right to choose teachers for the school, while at the same time, regional officials are told that they make the final decision. In some cases, the school boards act under one of the roles assigned to them by the policy and select the teachers. At the same time, the regional office may choose to use a different central guideline and override school board decisions in favor of a teacher it feels is better qualified. One regional official said, “The community does not have the right to choose teachers. That’s the region’s responsibility. But the communities are getting demanding.” Teachers have described a number of cases of conflict:

- *The community said that it wanted to choose its own teachers and was angry at the regional office for not accepting their suggestions.... The community had approached a teacher about the job. [The regional director] said that the community does not have the right to choose a teacher. They [the regional inspector] said to the school board, “Choose whom you want,” and the school board said, “We don’t know them and, anyway, Windhoek will send us whomever they want, so why choose?”*

As a result of experiences like these, some communities in Namibia feel they have less of a decisionmaking role than they did prior to independence and that the school board reforms have not assisted their participation.

In addition to ambiguity in the definition of roles, regional education office personnel are accustomed to working within a hierarchy that relegates communities to the bottom of the system. The mandate to delegate many educa-

Where Policy Hits the Ground

tional and management decisions to the school board requires a massive restructuring in perceptions of the roles of and the relationships between parents and regional authorities. And confidence in local communities' ability to make wise educational choices often is not strong

In both Malawi and Namibia, tensions about authority also exist between school boards or school committees and school personnel. Attitude shifts are required by both teachers and parents to enable parents to voice their concerns and make decisions about the school. The difference in educational levels between teachers and parents often creates rifts in communication. Educated people, who in rural areas may only be the teachers, often feel they should take control of meetings because of their knowledge of school matters, their facility in assigning tasks, and often, their belief that their own views are better informed and should prevail over those of the parents. The attitude of a head teacher in Malawi is not unusual:

- *The school committee does nothing. They are uneducated. They cannot read and write. They don't know education. They don't want to talk up. They only make me do the talk job.*

A principal in Namibia admitted that “A principal is reluctant to share the new policies with the parents.... They get involved in things they don't understand.” Another said, “In the past the headmaster was more of a lord. Now everyone wants a finger in the pie. They tie my hands.” In one Namibian school, teachers reported that “...the principal doesn't allow a school board,” although they said a list of members could be produced if the school

was questioned. Facing these attitudes and lacking confidence in their own skills and insights, parents on school boards and school committees often feel uneasy about stating their ideas and defer to the decisions of teachers.

The degree to which the roles of school boards or school committees have successfully been expanded frequently varies within the countries according to local social organization, a type of variation that will be explored in the chapter 3.

Resistance Due to Professional Values

Professional values, unlike cultural values, have been learned in connection to a specific profession, and those not practicing that profession may be unfamiliar with the same values. Within the education system, these values are often closely related to the “standards” teachers or administrators worry about. Different parts of the education system can have different professional standards on how to handle particular educational issues.

CENTRAL MINISTRY VS. TEACHERS

Malawi has always had high levels of repetition in all the standards of primary school. For example, in 1993–94 repetition rates for standards 1 and 2 were 23 and 20 percent respectively (Ministry of Education 1994). Over 60 percent of pupils who complete primary school take longer than eight years to complete the eight-year primary cycle (Williams 1992). The high levels of repetition put tremendous strain on an already resource-poor education system.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

MALAWI REPETITION POLICY

1. I wish to inform you that the Ministry of Education and Culture would like to reduce the number of repeaters in all primary schools from October, 1993.

2. It has therefore, been directed that only a specific percentage of repeaters will be allowed per standard as outlined below:

Standard	School Year		
	93/94	94/95	95/96*
Standard 1	15	10	8
Standard 2-3	10	8	7
Standard 4-7	10	10	7
Standard 8	45	35	30

—*Acting Secretary for Education and Culture, May 12, 1993*

**The policy was reissued by the Secretary with revised 95/96 targets on September 25, 1995*

In 1993–94 over 300 thousand pupils in standards 1 to 7, or 16.5 percent, were repeaters. Resources spent on repetition could be better spent on other much-needed improvements to the education system.

High rates of repetition can also have devastating effects on children's education. Not only do repeaters increase class sizes, making teaching and learning more difficult, but repetition results in many overage pupils in a classroom, making the progress of appropriate-aged children more difficult to achieve. Repetition in Malawi also increases the likelihood of dropout, having a disproportionately high effect on girls' dropout (Robinson et al. 1994).

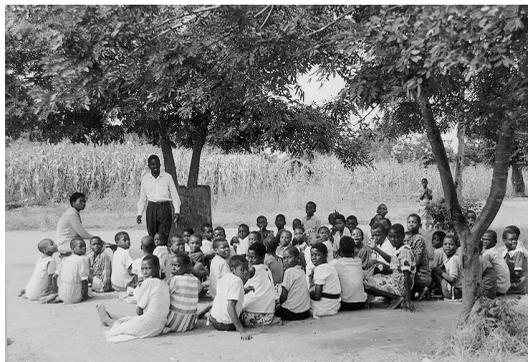
The Government of Malawi has, in recent years,

issued two new policies to address repetition. The first penalizes pupils who repeat standard 8 in hopes of improving their chances of selection for secondary school (see chapter 5). The second, issued in 1993, outlined repetition targets for a three-year period by limiting the percentage of pupils that should repeat for each standard of the primary cycle.

By setting repetition goals for all standards, policymakers hoped to encourage schools to make better decisions about which students could repeat. The policy represented a compromise between maintaining academic expectations for pupils and moving to the automatic repetition that has been adopted in many countries.

The repetition policy was related to a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) condition associated with non-project funds provided to the Government of Malawi. While the policy targeted a major problem in the Malawi education system, the government's support for the policy was weak. The ministry felt strongly that repetition needed to be reduced for the economic survival of the education system, but it lacked the capacity to monitor repetition to the degree that would have been necessary to implement the policy successfully. A registration system supported by USAID was key to making implementation possible. The registration system, however, ran into a multitude of difficulties: the numbers assigned to pupils overlapped, head teachers filled out forms incorrectly, and parents registered their children under false names or districts of origin.

Where Policy Hits the Ground



Repetition increases the number of pupils in a class and the range of ages within the class.

Difficulties in implementing the repetition policy arose not only from the technical problems associated with tracking the pupils. Definitions of repeating were not clear and teachers often were unsure who among their pupils was considered a repeater (see chapter 4). In addition, teachers strongly resisted the policy. They saw repetition not from the perspective of its long term effect on the entire education system, but from the short range perspective of individual pupils. While teachers expressed frustration at their large class sizes, very few made the connection between repetition and class size or between the costs of repetition and lack of teaching and learning materials. In fact, teachers often pointed to their large classes as a reason for not implementing the policy: “Pupils fail because there are too many pupils in one class. Individual help is not possible,” or “The government doesn’t like the system of repeating. But with large classes, sometimes twenty pupils are repeating.”

Teachers gave examination scores as the basis for their decisions about promotion or repetition. They strongly believed that pupils should not be promoted if they had not mastered the material covered by the exams as well as

that repetition increased the ability of the children. In addition, they believed that it is not fair to other teachers to promote pupils who lack the skills necessary for the next standard. Teachers were also aware of the specific circumstances against which pupils often struggled to receive an education. Teachers said that they had to “feel pity” for the child and allow repetition or that “It is killing a child to make them promoted when they can’t read or write.” The child’s age can be a factor in deciding whether to promote. One teacher explained, “I can promote a child to standard 2 if he is older than ten, but if he is younger, he can repeat.” One mother explained that her daughter had “...started school when she was four years old by just following her brother. So now she is seven and has repeated three times, so she is the right age.” Repetition is so much an accepted part of school that teachers often call pupils who have not repeated in a standard “beginners.” The number of repetitions can, in itself, also become the basis for promotion as one teacher pointed out “We never let them do a standard four times. Two or three times is the most.”

In addition to these professional and school-based concerns, teachers, as members of the communities in which they live, were subject to pressure from parents to promote or repeat pupils. Teachers reported that there was parental pressure to have pupils repeat a standard when educated parents were not pleased with the child’s class rank at the end of the year, or when they felt that the child was not mature enough for the next standard. On the other hand, there was parental pressure to promote children when parents had little education themselves, outside events had interfered with performance on exams,

Where Policy Hits the Ground

pupils were already overage, or female pupils were approaching the age when they could marry or become pregnant. Although parents most often wanted to have their children promoted, there was no consistent community attitude for or against the repetition policy. In most cases the communities were not even aware of the policy, as the government had felt it was a school matter and only communicated it to schools. As one school committee member said, “I haven’t heard anything about repetition on the radio, but the law says pupils can repeat as many times as they like [with free education].” Weak government support for the policy meant that no effort was made to increase popular understanding of the policy.

The most commonly stated cause for repetition was absenteeism. As a teacher explained, “Many children stay out of school to chase monkeys from the garden. Now it is after the harvest and they are returning in large numbers.” Other teachers reported similar circumstances, such as “Most of the repeaters are third-timers. They start but don’t finish [the year]. They just go to the lake catching fish. People go to the lake to buy fish and they are there selling.” Many schools reported that most of the pupils in the lower standards did not come to school during the rainy season. And one head teacher said, “There is more absenteeism now. Before they were forcing a child to go to school, but now the child says, ‘It’s free, you didn’t pay.’” All teachers were reluctant to promote a pupil who had missed a substantial amount of the school year.

Teachers resisted the repetition policy. They felt that the government did not understand their position or the circumstances in which pupils studied.

Resistance

The new policy required a radical shift in teaching practices, but had been created without input from teachers and disseminated without explanation of why their practice should change. Generally teachers ignored the policy. As one teacher said, “The policy is there, but we are the owners of the pupils.” Another said, “What we do is not the policy of the government. But since it is the future of the child, you cannot push a failure.” When interviewed, some head teachers claimed not to have heard of the policy rather than acknowledge the fact that the teachers were making no attempt to implement it while they were doing nothing to enforce it. One head teacher admitted, “We were not able to carry out that [policy].... The teachers were not oriented to it. They [the government] didn’t say why they want to discourage repetition.” The government’s lack of capacity to collect the data necessary to implement the policy led to the central ministry, regional, and district offices doing little to follow up on the policy once it was announced. One head teacher remarked, “We don’t know why they made that policy. No one came to explain it,” and another said, “They [the inspectors] don’t come to look at the percentages. They seem to ignore the policy, so we ignore it too.” There were neither immediate incentives for compliance with the policy, nor disincentives for failure to adhere to its guidelines.

Conclusions

Someone—if not policymakers, then someone else—has to take responsibility for anticipating what kinds of resistance each new policy might encounter before the policy is issued. Planning for implementation should

Where Policy Hits the Ground

include a strategy for overcoming any anticipated resistance and monitoring the implementation process to quickly recognize any that arises. Certain approaches may be better suited for some types of resistance than for others, which is why it is useful to categorize the reasons for resistance.

For example, what has been called cultural resistance requires massive communication and public debate to help people understand why the change is beneficial. Cultures are constantly evolving and can often change more rapidly than expected. Targeted information can create a more receptive audience for policy change if the content of the policy is within the conceptual framework of other changes that the society is experiencing. Resistance due to power shifts might require a more careful definition of roles and responsibilities as well as an attempt to negotiate rewards for the “losers.” Support for policies that challenge professional practices can be more closely targeted to those being affected, but may also require an opportunity for substantive discussion about why the change is being made.

In addition to directing support for the implementation of a policy according to the type of resistance it is likely to create (or has created), attention could be directed to where in the society the resistance lies. An examination of the eight policies investigated indicates some patterns in this resistance.

The information in Table 1 roughly corresponds to the implementation histories of the eight policies examined by this study. For example, the policy that has had the least success is the Malawi policy on repetition, which had weak government support, strong resistance from the schools, and inconsis-

tent input from the communities. The significance of strong government support has been highlighted in a wide range of previous research.

Table 1: Response to Policy According to Position in the System

Country/Policy	Central Ministry	Schools	Communities
N/Discipline	+	–	–
N/Language	+	–	v
N/School Boards	+		v
N/Teacher Ratio	+	v	v
M/Pregnancy	+	–	+
M/Repetition		–	
M/School Committees	+		v
M/Teacher Ratio	+	–	–

+ = support for policy; – = resistance to policy; v = mixed response

Several other patterns become apparent in this table, such as the strong opposition to the discipline policy in Namibia and to the pupil–teacher ratio policy in Malawi (see chapter 5). While the governments are fully committed to both of these policies, each proposed changes that challenged traditional ways of running schools. Namibia waged war on the cultural beliefs that formed the basis of this resistance and refused to back down on the decision to abolish corporal punishment, a commitment that has required extra, unanticipated resources. Malawi, with fewer resources than Namibia, is still grappling with the explosion in enrollments created by “free education,” and has yet to focus on the alleviation of some of their problems that could be achieved by more

Where Policy Hits the Ground

consistent implementation of the pupil–teacher ratio policy. In both cases, making the policies work against opposition by schools and communities takes additional resources and a dedicated effort.

Another pattern appears in the cases of the language policy in Namibia (see chapter 3) and the pregnancy policy in Malawi. Because both the governments and most communities supported these policies, overcoming resistance in schools was easier. Communicating the policy directly to the community and including the policy in an ongoing social mobilization campaign has changed teacher’s attitudes in Malawi, especially as they begin to have positive experiences with girls returning to school. The political climate in Namibia after the war for independence supports the language policy, which diminishes the role of a language that has been associated with oppression and introduces a language that can reduce the isolation felt by much of the country. Nevertheless, overcoming teacher resistance will require training teachers to speak, read, and write a new language, a slow and difficult process that will require many resources.

Perhaps the most difficult choices are illustrated in deciding how to support the implementation of policies may lie in the case of the three remaining policies this paper examines. These policies are supported strongly by the government, but have encountered a variety of reactions, varying from extreme opposition to great rejoicing. The next chapter explores how variations in the context in which the policy is to be implemented effect that process and its outcomes.

3. Variation in Context

Cultural, social, demographic, and geographic variations within countries are often immense in sub-Saharan Africa. The idea that a single policy will fit all circumstance is naïve. In addition, these variations often touch on the most dangerous political issues within a country, which can provide motivation for ignoring the existence of such variations.

Rural–Urban Variations

The differences between urban centers in Malawi and Namibia are probably less than the differences between rural and urban areas within either country. If a school is located in a city, its chances of having dependable mail delivery, phones, faxes, transportation, and radio reception are all increased dramatically. If the city happens to be where the district or regional office is located, then communications are even further improved. As a teacher in an urban Namibian school pointed out, “If the principal doesn’t understand a circular, he just calls the inspector on the phone.” A teacher in an urban Malawian school reported the same ease in obtaining information: “Because we are close to the district office, we can ask for explanation of circulars from them. If they don’t know they can send us to the regional office [also in this town].”

Rural areas in both Malawi and Namibia suffer from a lack of phones, faxes, and good transportation. Some suffer more than others because of

Where Policy Hits the Ground

factors such as extreme remoteness, infrastructure that is affected by weather, or a range of other obstacles. For example, one Namibian teacher complained, “Radios tell about workshops and other information. Many villages have radios, but they don’t always work. There are no shops here to buy batteries so when they run out it’s over. Botswana shops don’t always accept Namibian dollars so we have to wait to buy.” Difficulties in the communication of policy are a consistent problem in all rural areas. Though they may have come from rural communities, most policymakers live and work in urban areas, often forget the realities of villages, and seldom make it part of their implementation strategies to ensure that information about policy changes reaches rural areas.

It is not only the presence or absence of physical conditions such as good roads, phone service, or housing that create rural–urban differences. The values and practices of parents and their children have an affect on how difficult it will be to implement a policy, as cultural values and social practices vary according to rural or urban context. Teachers point out:

- *Educated parents are not here...they live in town.*
- *The members of the school board are all union members, and therefore organized, have a voice, and are political. Most of the parents work for Rossing mines.*
- *Parents see it [the school board] as important, although they don’t always participate. Rural schools are different. The people in the rural area, when they appoint the board, they really want to work. Maybe because they [urban parents] are employees and rural ones are free people.*

Variation in Context

- *The parents...are willing to give money to the school. They have money because they're urban.*
- *There are twelve chiefs in the area...two are on the school committee. If the chief told the community to send kids to school, the community listens.*
- *Everybody on the school committee can read and write.*

Urban and rural parents often have different expectations for their children, which can assist or interfere with the implementation of specific policies.

In rural areas:

- *The oldest learner in the school is 27; he is in grade 6. Twelve or thirteen is the oldest child in grade 1. The problem is with the parents. They want the children to watch the cattle and goats.*
- *Parents want the child to repeat because they want the child to have math skills. At the estate [where the children work] they want the child to be able to count money so he won't be cheated.*
- *In remote areas learners often begin schooling late, ten years old for example.*

In urban areas:

- *Over 90 percent pass standard 1. Maybe it is because most children in urban areas go to nursery school. There is not a problem with repetition in the infant sections.*
- *The parents cheat us [urban school] because some of their children are bigger [for their age]. Some parents were forging birth certificates. They've got many children. They want us to take their children from them during the day [so they can work].*

Where Policy Hits the Ground

- *Some parents, especially in the urban areas, like their pupils to repeat before standard 8. In the rural areas, they can just be promoted.*

Urban parents are less homogeneous than those in rural areas where people of similar cultural and economic backgrounds tend to live in the same village. One urban teacher said, “I have almost 200 in the class in standard 2. Because they come from different parents and have different behaviors, it takes a lot of time to keep them under control.” Multiple home languages may mean that most children are learning a new language in their first years of school. Teachers at a former all-white urban school in Namibia reported that one of the biggest challenges they face are differences in achievement; many learners from previously colored and black schools need remedial work to catch up to children already enrolled in this school. Urban schools also have a different type of staff than rural schools, which can make some policies easier, and others harder, to implement.

- *Teachers with more qualifications don't want to go to rural areas because they want a house, flush toilets, electricity.*
- *We didn't strike because these are our own children. Our friends in town did.*
- *Urban areas have an over-quota of teachers.... Women must follow their husbands.*
- *Most of the urban teachers are females. It's not a profession for men because the pay is too low.*
- *There are no educated people around this area. Teachers are told this area is difficult on communication. When teachers find their placement they say, “Ahh, find me another area please.”*

One-Size-Fits-All Policies

The variations in the contexts in which schooling occurs go well beyond these contrasts between rural and urban worlds. Policymakers, working from a model of their own urban location, tend to forget or ignore how the other contexts in their countries may or may not be able to respond to specific policy reforms. They may, in fact, deliberately try to distance themselves from any village associations and be unwilling to publicly announce what they may know, which is that a policy will not work in the villages that they understand. Pilot studies that investigate the types of problems that a policy might encounter or a conscientious effort to collect and respond to feedback about the difficulties encountered are needed. Such studies could help improve the likelihood of successful policy implementation for all of the country.

SCHOOL BOARD POLICY IN NAMIBIA

The Government of Namibia created a policy defining roles, responsibilities, and membership in school boards as a way to increase local participation in school management. Population density and social organization vary radically in Namibia, and these variations had a powerful effect on the implementation process. The following three examples illustrate the range of circumstances in which the school board policy was implemented and how these locations have shaped the implementation processes.

There are characteristics of towns that have made implementation of the school board policy both easier and more difficult. Urban parents live near

Where Policy Hits the Ground

schools, which means that they can generally attend meetings with ease. They are often able to read and can, therefore, be contacted by letter. And they often have the education or experience to feel comfortable asserting their rights as parents and community members and are not intimidated by the principal and teachers (who are included on school boards in Namibia). For example, the parents on one urban school board included a medical doctor, an attorney, a senior official in the municipality, a mine manager, and a business owner. The power of some urban school boards, due to the sophistication and relative wealth of their members, can also be a problem for regional offices. One school board in a large city hired an airplane to take them to the regional office in order to provide input on teacher hiring and textbook delivery decisions.

In urban areas, the role of the school boards, which includes the ability to select and discipline teachers, set fees, and decide some curricular issues, became important to the integration of previously white schools. In some urban areas, the new school board membership enabled various nonwhite ethnic groups to gain control of their local schools, although this frequently resulted in an exodus of white learners to private schools. In other urban areas, a concentration of white parents was able to dominate the school board and, through it, set entrance standards and fees high enough to exclude most nonwhite learners.

The participation of urban parents, in spite of their ease in reaching the school, their confidence, and the value they place on the education of their children is, ironically, often lower than that of rural parents. Many urban parents view themselves as too busy to take time for school board meetings or feel

NAMIBIAN SCHOOL BOARD POLICY

1. Every community in which a school is situated has the serious public responsibility to participate in the administration of the school and its activities.
2. The principal and the School Board should initiate and support parent participation in school affairs.
3. The School Board must be elected democratically.
4. Members of the School Board should be provided with...training.
5. The School Board should not only act in an advisory capacity, but should also have decision-making powers.
6. The school community should be represented on the highest level of the local educational structure.
7. All official communication by and with the School Board should normally be channelled through the principal or the School Board's Regional Council representatives.
8. The School Board should meet at least once a quarter.
9. Matters in which the School Board should have decision-making powers include: disciplinary action concerning unprofessional conduct of teachers; disciplinary action concerning unresolved student conduct in conflict with the best interests of the school; appointment and suspension of teachers; fund-raising for the school fund; approval of school fund budget; authorisation of school fund expenditure; general problems experienced by students; identification of community needs; promotion and development of extramural activities; matters incidental to the smooth functioning of the school and hostel.

....

Where Policy Hits the Ground

that they have hired “experts” to run the school for them and that they should not be asked to play a role in the school’s management.

Namibia’s population is distributed so unevenly that pockets of extremely low density can be found in many areas. One school, which had been created only the previous year, initially held classes under a tree, but now consists of stick buildings. All eighty learners, ranging in age from 6 to 14 years, were in the first grade. Some of them walked up to two hours to arrive each day. The school had one teacher, some books, and no writing materials. Many of the schools in Namibia are boarding schools because too few families live close enough to one another to support a day school. One school without a boarding hostel found that enrollment dropped from September to December because the learners in the school left with their parents when the cattle were moved to other grazing grounds. Four years earlier, parents had built a small



Some schools in Namibia are extremely isolated.

house near the school so the children could attend school while the parents were with their herds. The problem with the community-built housing has been that there is no adult to watch after the children and, although there is a feeding program at the school during the day, there was no meal prepared for them at night. The

Variation in Context

school fund, collected by the school board, is now being used to pay women to cook for the children in the evening.

In areas of low population density, implementing the school board policy has been a problem. In areas where learners stay in boarding facilities, few parents live near enough the school to participate in school meetings. In one school, only fifteen learners lived near enough to attend without boarding. The three parent positions on the school board were filled by the school janitor, a woman who did cleaning in the boarding facility, and the owner of the local liquor store. Because two of the parents worked for the school, as well as the three teachers on the board, the principal had a disproportionate influence over school board decisions. Parents had frequently contacted the regional office with problems rather than go through the school board because they did not feel that it fairly represented their position.

In a third Namibian context, school boards have been incorporated into strong traditional social structures. In these areas the school board plays a very active role in school management, hiring, and promoting teachers, settling disputes, and handling school funds. School boards in this context actually function as one principal described them, “as the eyes of the parents.” In Katima Mulilo, the chiefs are well respected. With the chiefs on or behind the school boards, these schools have the highest percentage of parents who pay their school fees in the country. The communities’ strong support has led to active school boards that have provided accommodations for the teachers, taken on important roles in monitoring school processes, and collected school fund

Where Policy Hits the Ground

money to award academic prizes, supplement books and teaching aids, upgrade school grounds, support sports activities, and even provide a school bus. In one school, the school board comes to the school in the morning once a week to check on how the teachers are doing. At another school in the area, a complaint that a teacher had beaten a learner was investigated by both the school and the school board. The parents may take the problem to the traditional authorities where a judgment will be rendered. A possible outcome could be that the teacher will have to pay a fine to the tribal authority. In some cases, the roles of traditional leaders and social organizations are so intertwined with the activities of the school boards that it is difficult to separate the structures. For example, in one area, the parents' committee elects the school board. The parents' committee is chosen at the tribal court, which the local chief chairs. The headman from each village nominates a candidate for the school board from his village.

In each of these three contexts—one urban, one with low population density, and one with strong local social structures—the school board policy has been implemented differently. Because the original policy statement could not be broad enough to cover all possible difficulties, it is important that a feedback system be established through which special conditions can be recognized and policy modifications can be made to adjust to these variations.

LANGUAGE POLICY IN NAMIBIA

One of the early changes made by the Government in Namibia was a switch in the official language from Afrikaans to English. In 1992, the Ministry

Variation in Context

of Education carried the language change further by issuing a policy making English the language of instruction starting in the fourth grade. In addition, school boards were given the power to select among local languages and English as the language of instruction for the first three years of school. The change to English put great stress on the entire system, as few Namibians spoke English at the time of independence. However, English was not only considered politically neutral, but the language offered the greatest benefits in terms of future international involvement for the country. The use of local languages for the first three years of schooling was grounded both in research indicating that children do better if they are initially instructed in their home language and in the need to increase the status of many of the languages spoken in Namibia.

Attitudes about the use of English are greatly affected by the history and politics of the individual regions of Namibia, as illustrated by the three regions where data was gathered for this study. The Katima Mulilo region was originally colonized by the British and is surrounded on three sides by Botswana and Zambia. Although the South African military maintained a presence here, Afrikaans never took root in the region as it did in the rest of Namibia. In Katima Mulilo the use of English as the medium of instruction is not perceived as a problem because English was already widely spoken and was already the language of instruction in schools. In fact, English is exceptionally useful in the region because Botswana and Zambia, both English-speaking, are close and there is extensive cross-border travel throughout the area.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

In the Khorixas region, there is more resistance to the use of English. From the south of the region, where there are white-owned cattle ranches, to the north of the region, where the South African military maintained a presence, Afrikaans was the dominant language as well as the language of instruction in many of the schools until independence. Teachers are comfortable using Afrikaans—for many of them it is their home language. Depending on the ethnic group, including whites, there were mixed reactions to the change in language. Many of the teachers in this area are able to express themselves fairly well in English.

In Ondangwa West, which fell under the former Administration for Owambos, the language of instruction in the schools was Afrikaans (perceived as the language of the oppressor) until the early 1980s, when the decision was taken to use English as the medium of instruction after grade 3. Instruction in grades 1–3 has been in local language since that time. In Ondangwa, the statements of support for English as the medium of instruction are strong, grounded usually in a desire to move away from Afrikaans, or the belief that English will better link them to the outside world. While there is broad support for the switch to English as the official language and as the language of instruction, few teachers in this region speak English proficiently.

In primary schools where there is a relatively homogenous population, some schools have chosen a local language for instruction, while others have selected English starting in grade 1 because parents want to give their children an early start with the official language. In urban schools, where a

Variation in Context

number of different home languages are often spoken by learners, there are more options, more difficulties, and more opportunities to manipulate the policy. A comparison between two schools shows how the consequences of implementing this policy can be different depending on the ability of the school to manipulate the system.

In a former white school located in an urban area, the ratio of learners to teachers was twenty to one, below the recommended ratio. According to policy, the regional office should transfer teachers to other schools, or the school should not be entitled to receive new teachers until the proper class sizes are achieved, either by increasing enrollments or through teacher attrition. But because the school comprises two local language groups, and because extra teachers were allocated to the school so that each language group could receive home language instruction in lower primary, the school benefited from smaller class sizes.

In a remote rural boarding school, also with two local language groups and twenty learners per teacher, results were different. The school board decided that all pupils would receive instruction in their home language. The school does not have enough teachers who speak the languages to provide this kind of instruction. One teacher is consequently facing the double challenge of teaching a multigrade class in two home languages, one of which is not her own. Her class is divided into four groups, and she copes as best she can. She feels ill-equipped to teach in the second language and expressed frustration with the demands placed upon her.

Where Policy Hits the Ground



Schools in Namibia can represent very different contexts within which the same policy is to be implemented.

In the first case, the regional office deferred to the school by not implementing the class size policy, an equity issue, and chose instead to honor the language policy, a decision that affects quality. This school is located in the same community as the regional office, so the concerns of a powerful school board were more easily voiced and listened to. In the case of the second school, the class size and language policies are both in place, although the school is not able to effectively implement the language policy. In this school, communication between the school and the regional office is not strong.

The linguistic and cultural diversity among the learners in a school can have a dramatic effect on policy implementation; moreover, the policy implementation can have an effect on the diversity of the school. For example, prior to independence, a small school in the Khorixas region had about forty white learners. The school population was so low that the school was in danger of being closed as part of the government's rationalization process. The school

decided to admit black learners in order to remain open, after which some white parents withdrew their children. The language of instruction had been Afrikaans, but the parents of the new black learners brought up the question of language to the school board. While all the new learners at the school spoke Damara, the white teachers did not. The school, therefore, adopted English as the language of instruction, even for the first three grades. Then the remaining white learners left the school.

Conclusions

These two examples, which illustrate the powerful effect variation in context can have on policy implementation, are from Namibia. While regional variations in Malawi, especially in the availability of teachers,³ have influenced policy implementation, the role of variation is generally less pronounced than in Namibia. The geography, history, and population of these two countries have combined to create a clear difference in the amount of variation in factors that affect policy implementation found in each country. Namibia's sparse population is spread thinly over a harsh environment that can create barriers to contact. From 1969 to 1990, Namibia was governed by South Africa through the

³A disproportionate percentage of the teachers in Malawi are in the Northern Region due to the higher levels of education there as well as the 1989 requirement that all teachers return to their region of origin. The 1989 ruling left the Central and Southern regions short of teachers, a situation that remains serious due to the increased enrollments associated with "free education," although teachers are now free to move from region to region.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

creation of ethnically defined homelands and the irregular settlement of the country, which isolated areas from one another. Malawi, on the other hand, is a small, densely settled country in which ethnic and regional differences were consciously ignored and repressed during the long rule of President Banda. The differences between Namibia and Malawi demonstrate how countries can vary in the degree of internal variation that affects policy implementation.

As these examples demonstrated, variations that can play a role in the implementation of policies are of many types: demographic, cultural, social, organizational, and economic. All of the policies that were examined had different implementation paths in rural and urban contexts. And many, if not all, of the policies encountered specific obstacles to implementation in some contexts, and factors that assisted in implementation in other contexts. While each policy can interact with any specific context in a variety of ways, many of those interactions could have been anticipated.

Variation within countries is not unknown to policymakers. Yet it is not uncommon for policies to appear to be tailored to fit the urban context in which the policymakers live. Nor is it unusual for the announcement of a policy not to have been preceded by an examination of how the various contexts of the society will affect the policy's implementation. Nor is extra support generally directed to those areas of the country where the implementation is expected to be particularly difficult. Moreover, it is usually only after word of implementation difficulties have begun to filter back to the policymakers that an attempt is made to collect feedback about the implementation process.

4. Communication

In both countries, the focus of attention tends to be on the policy itself rather than on the mechanisms for communicating it. In fact, communication should be the first step in implementing a policy.

Structure of Communication

In Malawi and Namibia, most education policies are generated by the Ministry of Education, although regional and district offices may also issue their own policies. In both countries, communication generally flows from the center out (or from the top down). While communication should travel in both directions, in practice relatively little information from communities and schools makes its way back through the system. As one teacher said, “The circulars are just sent out. The ministry feels as if they have sent out policy. No communication goes back up to them.” Officially, policy is communicated by written circular from the ministry to regional offices, from there through district or circuit offices to head teachers, who are responsible for communicating the information to the teachers and the community. This hierarchical chain of communication is followed much of the time.

There are, however, immense contrasts in how Malawi and Namibia handle communication, differences related to the major dissimilarities between the two countries. Malawi is densely settled, with very few resources and very

Where Policy Hits the Ground

little of the infrastructure needed for communication. Namibia has better resources than most sub-Saharan countries, and well-developed road and phone systems, but its communities are often extremely small and isolated.

Table 2: Lines of Communication in Malawi and Namibia

PERSONNEL	MALAWI	NAMIBIA
Regional officers	3 regions	7 regions
District officers	6 to 8 per region	1 region has 2 districts
District links to schools	Primary education assistant (PEA) serves a zone	Inspector serves a circuit
School Head	Head teacher	Principal
Teachers	8 standards	Varies from 1 to 8 grades
School committee/ school board	Elected community members	Principal, equal numbers of teachers and elected community members

Communication to Whom

Simply checking who knew of policies, irrespective of what they knew about them, indicated that there are often large communication gaps. Some gaps occurred because policymakers decided to limit their communication on a need-to-know basis. The idea that everyone should know as much as possible about policy changes is uncommon, especially when such knowledge could lead to greater power or a larger share of resources. Even when teachers and community members had heard about policies, little effort had been directed toward explaining the policy changes to them, why the policy had been

created, or how to implement it, which meant that their understanding of the policy was minimal. The following examples demonstrate how a failure in the communication of a policy to some parts of the school system or to communities can lead to a failure to implement the policy in the way that was envisioned.

REPETITION POLICY IN MALAWI

One of two repetition policies in Malawi attempts to limit repetition in standard 8 by weighing the likelihood that a pupil will be admitted to secondary school against the number of times the pupil has repeated standard 8. The reputation of schools in Malawi rests on how many of their pupils are selected for secondary school. Teachers, parents, and pupils all believe that pupils will do better on the exam that determines selection to secondary school⁴ each time they repeat standard 8. The better students do on the exam, the better their chances are for being selected to secondary school. In the past, many pupils repeated standard 8 as many as twelve times.

If teachers and communities are unaware that those repeating standard 8 are being penalized according to the new policy, pupils may waste time and effort repeating, teachers and schools may continue to have a high number of pupils in standard 8, and the schools' reputations may suffer when their pupils are not selected for secondary school.

⁴There are other factors, such as “second selection,” by which an unknown number of pupils are added to those with the highest scores on the exam. This has always contributed to a lack of transparency in the secondary school selection process.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

Regional education officer:

- *The head teachers do know that repeaters have less chances, but somewhere there's a gap in communication and expectations.*

District education officer:

- *Repetition, I'm not sure if this was a policy that got sent to the schools.... The pupils don't know the implications of it.*

Teachers:

- *The government has not disclosed the system for repetition in standard 8.*
- *There are rumors about that.*
- *Newcomers [to standard 8] are given more chances.... These are just recommendations for repetition.*
- *There is no problem with repeating standard 8 as long as the pupil chooses to do so.*

School committee member:

- *I haven't heard anything about repetition on the radio, but the law says they [pupils] can repeat as many times as they like. Some did stay in standard 8 ten times. It is up to the parents to decide.*

In one school in Malawi, the head teacher did not understand the implication of the standard 8 repetition policy for pupils, and remained convinced that permitting pupils to repeat standard 8 would improve their chances of securing a place in secondary school. Seventy-two percent of the standard 8 pupils in this school had repeated standard 8. No pupils had been selected for secondary school in two years. Parent and pupil confidence in the school had

decreased, and over half of the standard 8 pupils from the previous year had left to repeat at another school.

LEARNER–TEACHER RATIO IN NAMIBIA

The Namibian policy on class size was issued primarily to redistribute teachers throughout the entire education system more equitably than under the apartheid regime. The ratio of learners to teachers was significantly lower in the formerly white schools than in other schools, where classes sometimes contained over 100 learners. In 1994, 60 percent of all schools in the Ondangwa region, which had been an ethnically defined area under apartheid, had more than thirty-five learners per teacher, while less than 1 percent of the classes had over thirty-five learners in the predominately white Windhoek area (Ministry of Basic Education and Culture 1995).

The ministry envisioned this policy as being implemented primarily by regional offices, where decisions about teacher assignments are made. Communication about the learner–teacher ratios to schools was, consequently, often simply delivered through a circular that contained little, if any, explanation about how it was to be implemented and by whom. Class sizes also vary throughout Namibia according to density of population; the areas with the largest class sizes tend to be in the north of the country where populations are large and facilities for teachers are frequently unavailable. In a number of schools in these areas it was apparent that principals had interpreted the learner–teacher ratio policy statement to mean that they should limit learner

Where Policy Hits the Ground

enrollment to achieve the recommended ratio. While the government introduced the policy as a basis for moving teachers from schools with low learner–teacher ratios to those with too many learners per teacher, these schools could not control the number of teachers assigned to them, and so attempted to implement the policy by controlling the number of learners who were admitted.

Some principals in northern Namibia reported:

- *They have informed us and we have already informed the parents and learners.... [We] requested additional teachers. The regional office apparently only meant don't accept new learners that would push up the size of the classes and don't accept more than thirty-five new grade ones per teacher.*
- *We have not enough teachers. Next year we will not have overcrowding no more. We only enroll enough for the class...thirty-five kids per class.... There are forty-nine in grade 1 [this year].*
- *In 1993 we took all the children, but from 1994 we limit grade 1. The government gives thirty-five as a suggestion. We are overcrowded, but they don't send a teacher to help. In our community there are many children who want to come to school, and if they are sent back they stay at home until they are ten. Then they are ten in grade 1.*
- *We say no if the class is big enough.... It is not every year that we need to turn learners away.*
- *For newcomers, as from last year, we only let [in] thirty-five. But the ones we have already in school, we don't refuse. So grade 1 has thirty-five learners, but grades 2 through 10 are overcrowded.*

Turning away children who wish to enroll in school was hardly the intent of the policy. Yet, without an explanation of how schools were to implement the policy,⁵ given their inability to secure more teachers, head teachers viewed limiting enrollment as the only option available.

Types of Communication

Multiple channels can be and often are used to communicate a policy change. The choice of how the policy will be communicated is not only influenced by who is to be reached but, also by the tradeoffs associated with each approach to communication.

Table 3: Methods of Policy Communication

	Same policy description received by everyone	Provides record of policy to refer to over time	Assumes no level of skill in an official language	Provides opportunity for questions and discussion
Circulars	✓	✓		
Meetings			✓	✓
Media	✓		✓	

THE WRITTEN WORD

A written form provides a set standard; everyone receives the same version of the policy. Memories are less than perfect and a circular provides an authority against which to test different interpretations. Policies are most commonly seen as something issued once, and unless something is issued to

⁵When the regional office realized how this policy had been misunderstood in many schools, it scheduled meetings to better explain the policy and its implementation.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

change that policy, remain in effect in perpetuity. In several cases, the policies being explored involved restatements or changes in previous policies that left people confused about which was the current version of the policy. Because both Malawi and Namibia had recently undergone radical changes in government, older personnel are often unsure if policies issued prior to changes in the government are still in effect. Both Malawi and Namibia have also recently experienced large increases in enrollment, which has led to the hiring of many new, often untrained, teachers. Without written records, these new teachers have limited ways to learn about policies that were issued prior to their arrival, and educational personnel are often unable to refer to a concrete policy statement.

The greatest difficulty in relying on circulars as a means of distributing policy information lies in the lack of facilities in many countries to copy, type, and store such documents. In Malawi, most regional offices were able to copy the circulars sent to them by the ministry and to send them out to their district offices, although the potential for delays in the process was considerable. As one regional education officer said, “We have one photocopier and when it breaks down, we are in trouble. There is only one computer, and that is used for salaries. You can wait up to one month to have your letters typed.... We can use the photocopier at the agriculture office if we bring our own paper.” District offices have fewer resources than regional offices and are often more isolated. District staff related stories of their lack of copiers or broken copiers, their paper shortages, and the unreliability of the mail system to get the circulars to schools. Crowded office space in district offices and lack of support

personnel to file materials generally resulted in haphazard storage of the circulars. In no district office in Malawi were personnel able to quickly find circulars about policies.

Schools have even greater difficulty in receiving and disseminating information about policies. District officers expressed uncertainty about the fate of the circulars they sent to the schools:

- *When the circular comes we must duplicate it here and send it to the head teachers at schools. The head teacher is supposed to give the information to the teachers. Sometimes they just read it themselves.*
- *The head teachers don't have storage space. They keep the circulars in their own houses, but when they transfer they take the circulars with them. And schools frequently do not receive circulars and often do not know what circulars they should have received in order to rectify the problem.*

One head teacher reported:

- *We find out about new policies from the district office. They post it. The post is now being run by the local government and they are not getting paid, so the post hasn't been open for two or three weeks.*



Schools often have inadequate facilities for storing records.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

Head teachers in Malawi sometimes display new circulars on bulletin boards but more commonly keep circulars in their offices where they are gradually swamped by the incoming tide of class records, requests, and other paperwork. In one interview, a head teacher insisted he had never heard of a particular policy while the circular describing the policy could be seen tacked to the board behind his chair.

But storage is not only a problem on the level of school and district in Malawi. The research team was unable to locate any of the circulars describing the policies being examined in the central Ministry of Education. The lack of permanent archives where circulars can be revisited even in the central offices can mean that different versions of the same circular may be in circulation. In 1993, the ministry issued a complex policy that sets targets of different percentages of pupils who could repeat in standards 1–7 over the next three years. In 1995, the ministry reminded schools that a repetition policy existed and set targets at higher percentages for repeaters in 1995/6 than had existed in the 1993 version of the policy.⁶

In Namibia, there are more resources available to assist in the communication of policy than there are in Malawi. The written word tends to dominate; circulars are distributed and kept at all levels of the education system. In all of the Namibian regional and school principal offices that were

⁶The 1993 policy requirements for 1995/96: standard 1: 8 percent; standards 2–3: 7 percent; and standards 4–7: 7 percent. The 1995 policy requirements for 1995/96: standards 1–2: 18 percent; standards 3–7: 10 percent.

visited, policy circulars could be instantly produced, and were usually carefully filed with other circulars. The thoroughness of the Namibian written system was demonstrated when discussing the new policy preventing the use of corporal punishment. A principal in the northern part of the country said, “Even before [independence] the teachers were not allowed to beat [learners]. No ordinary teacher was allowed to give corporal punishment. It must be in the presence of the principal. And only to boys, because it was on the buttocks, not to the girls.” The principal then located two circulars that gave explicit directions on how to administer corporal punishment: One was issued in 1973 by the Department of Bantu Education, and the other in 1979 by the South African Department of Education. Both remained in files where they could be easily located.

Namibian schools also attempt to use written communication to reach communities, often sending written material home with pupils. One school principal in Namibia sent a monthly newsletter home to parents to inform them of activities and problems. Another principal in Namibia who tried to send written notes to parents pointed out that “The problem with sending notices is that they cost money...stationary, photocopy, etc.” One school board member also reported using written messages to reach community members. The usefulness of this approach for communicating with the community is limited to areas where a majority of the parents can read, which often eliminates those areas of the country where communication with parents is most needed.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

THE SPOKEN WORD

While paper and copiers are less of a problem in Namibia than Malawi, distances are greater and transportation less available. Meetings as a way of distributing information about a policy change are, therefore, less often tried in Namibia than in Malawi. The preference for meetings as a means to disseminate information about a new policy in Malawi was explained by one government official as consistent with the culture, Malawi being an “oral culture” rooted in how chiefs pass on information. The major problem with oral transmission of policy, he said, is in the transformations that occur each time the policy was repeated. Like the game of “telephone,” the content of the policy gradually changed with each transmission until everyone had received slightly different versions. In addition, no record is left of what the policy states, so, after time or change in personnel, no one is sure what the policy is.

The main advantage of meetings as a means for disseminating policy is that they provide an opportunity to discuss the policy. The degree to which this actually happens varies, as officials tend to prefer to tell others what the policy is rather than listen to questions or engage in discussion. Meetings can, however, make a tremendous difference in communicating policy information. In one district of the Central region of Malawi, the primary education assistants initiated the practice of each holding a meeting with all of the head teachers from their zone once a month. New policies were part of what was discussed in those meetings. Of the seven districts in Malawi in which interviews occurred,

the teachers in this district were far better informed about the policies than the teachers in other districts.

Another advantage of meetings as compared to circulars is that the policy can be described in local languages. Although English is the official language in both countries, competency varies. In Namibia the use of English for policy statements has been a major problem as the percentage of those in the education system with fluent English skills is still low; in Malawi, most education system personnel are competent in English, but they are still better able to explore the nuances of the policy in local languages.

In both Namibia and Malawi, communication about meetings and transportation to meetings can create serious problems. Teachers in both countries described the often long and difficult routes they must take if they need to go to a meeting in a district or regional office. A head teacher in Malawi reported that “The primary education assistant does not come here to bring information from Zomba [district office].... I don’t prefer to go to Zomba. It means leaving my class with no teacher.... To get to Zomba I walk to the Chigale turnoff [13 km away]. The bus comes to that place. It takes three hours to walk and then up to one hour to wait for the bus and then about an hour bus ride.... I cycle to Zomba when it’s a good condition. It takes three and a half hours.” A teacher in Namibia described an even more arduous route to the regional office: “In order to reach Katima [regional office] we get rides [hitchhike] that travel in a waterbed. But it fills up for months in the rainy season.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

During that time it is impossible to get to there without first crossing the Chobe river by dugout and then getting a ride from Botswana to the border and crossing back into Namibia.... It takes about four to five hours if the hikes [rides] are good.” District officers can have almost as much difficulty reaching the schools. In both countries the transportation of regional and district personnel to schools is a major barrier to many activities of the education system, including policy implementation.

Attending meetings requires not only the ability to travel, but also knowing about the meetings in time to travel to them. Teachers in Namibia reported that “We are not informed of workshops in time to enroll before they fill up,” or that “We get the circulars in the post but get them late. I missed a principals’ meeting Monday because I didn’t find out about it until it was all over.”

The pattern for who meets with whom is often less clear than the pathways for written communication. All three regional offices in Malawi complained that the ministry often bypassed them to meet directly with district personnel to discuss new policies. This left the regional personnel feeling left out and, worse, sometimes unaware of policy changes. As one regional education officer said “Sometimes they [the ministry] send things to the district first.... Sometimes information goes straight from the ministry to the school and by the time we hear about these things the schools already know.”

THE MEDIA

Radio reaches beyond the education system and can be used as means for communicating directly with communities. The policy that allowed girls who had become pregnant to return to school was very popular in communities throughout Malawi, as pregnancy is one of the primary reasons girls drop out of school. It is a policy that has to be implemented by community members, as the girl or her parents must apply to have her readmitted after the child is born. Both because the community was seen as a primary implementor and because the policy could be claimed by the government as something that delighted much of the population, the ministry communicated the policy directly to communities by radio as well as through circulars and meetings to reach education system personnel. As one community member said, “[We] heard about the policy on the radio. Everybody was dancing and clapping hands and saying, ‘My child will continue her education.’” As a result of this approach, almost every person who was interviewed, including pupils and community members, had heard of the new pregnancy policy. And, in most cases, they had heard of it from the radio announcements.

When education system personnel were interviewed, soon after the new pregnancy policy had been announced, many expressed disapproval. Those who disapproved had initially limited the implementation of this policy by not passing on the communication that they had received. In some districts, none of the schools had received a circular from the district office. In many schools, the head teachers who had received a circular had not informed their teachers of

Where Policy Hits the Ground

the policy change. And very few head teachers had informed school committees or held meetings to inform the community about the policy. By communicating directly with the community, the ministry placed the school between two forces for implementation: the top–down thrust of the official channels (circulars and meetings), and the bottom–up push of the community, who had been notified through the media. Several years later, this policy had been more fully implemented than any of the other policies examined. Girls had returned to school, taken exams, and gone on to secondary school; teachers had reexamined their initial reactions and decided that, at the very least, they did not want to resist the re-enrollment of girls.

Although most radio stations charge for making announcements, the cost of using radio is less than either distribution of written material or bringing people together for meetings. The radio does not, however, reach everywhere in either Namibia or Malawi. And for the majority of communities without electricity, keeping enough batteries for radios has been a problem. But the most serious difficulty in using the media to distribute policy information revolves around questions about the validity of the messages received, that is “Is it official?” Teachers in Malawi indicated their hesitancy regarding learning about policy by radio: “Sometimes we hear policies on the radio but it carries no weight. We expect the district office to send us a circular,” or “The information is not communicated well to us from the [district] office...by the writing in the circulars. Sometimes we get information by radio. We are hesitant to follow the idea.”

Another problem with the use of radio to communicate information about policies lies in its close relationship to the new political processes in both countries. Democracy requires that political parties communicate with the voters and the media is often the prime method for such communication. Making the separation between political statements of intentions and government statements of accomplishments can be difficult, leaving many community members unsure if a certain policy exists. And major government officials have not always been careful in the wording or timing of policy reforms. Sometimes before the education system can ready itself to implement a policy change, political leaders have already announced popular policies to the entire country. As one regional education officer in Malawi said, “It was not supposed to be for public consumption. But the radio announced it.”

What is Communicated

Circulars, radio announcements, and often meetings do little more than state what the policy is. In order to implement a policy change, people generally need to understand a number of other things.

CONTENT

What is spelled out in the statement of policy should include a definition of key terms and concepts. In Namibia, principals and teachers only rarely stated that they continued to use corporal punishment after the new discipline policy had been issued, but it was clear that in many parts of

Where Policy Hits the Ground

Namibia the policy had not been implemented. One of the barriers to implementation that most teachers mentioned was a failure to understand just what “corporal punishment” is and what other kinds of punishment could be used that were acceptable.

Teachers in Namibia gave a variety of definitions of corporal punishment:

- *The teachers are confused about the definition of corporal punishment. Even a small lash is considered corporal punishment.*
- *Instead [of corporal punishment], when a learner is naughty he must kneel on the floor with the feet in the air and hold a heavy book bag over the head for ten or fifteen minutes.*
- *Corporal punishment is also when you insult a child. For example, if you call her a monkey then it will make her feel bad or she will feel like she is ugly.*
- *Corporal punishment is beating until blood comes.*
- *Corporal punishment is when a teacher punishes a child but the child did not make a mistake.*
- *Making a child stand facing a wall is corporal punishment.*
- *Some work is corporal punishment and some is not: sweeping and cleaning toilets is not; digging holes and cutting trees are because they are outside working in the sun.*

The government sent a “Code of Conduct” to schools in order to help teachers understand what discipline they could use instead of corporal

punishment, but teachers reported that they were unable to understand it because it was in English or because it offered punishments that they could not use such as “library work” (most schools do not have libraries).

The repetition policy in Malawi also encountered a number of questions about the definition of terms. Uncertainty about what the term “repeater” meant made it difficult to implement the policy consistently. One district officer declared that “Anyone who drops out and comes back is called a repeater. It’s not just the child who took the exam and failed,” while a head teacher said, “Repeaters are only those who have taken the exam and failed, not those who drop out.” Teachers asked, “Do dropouts who come back next year count as repeaters?” Many schools in Malawi keep statistics in categories that would make it very difficult to determine who is a repeater. For example, one school tracked the following: number dropped for good, number dropped and repeated, number failed and repeated, and number failed and dropped. When asked to calculate the number of repeaters, which category or combination of categories should they use? And shifts in perspective can change the meaning of terms, as in focusing on the pupils rather than the class in defining repetition: “It doesn’t say how many times a pupil can repeat. It only gives percentages.”

In addition to not communicating information about the definition of terms key to policy reforms, there is seldom any definition of who is to play what roles in implementing the policy. For example, who is the party responsible for monitoring the implementation of any policy is almost always vague. If no one has been assigned responsibility, then, as in most bureaucracies, there

Where Policy Hits the Ground

appears to be little motivation to take on the role. For example, a teacher in Malawi said, “The primary education assistant doesn’t come to look at the percentages [of repetitions]. They come to look at other things. They seem to ignore the policy, so we ignore it too.” This meshes perfectly with a primary education assistant’s comment that “The teacher and the headmaster make the decision about passing and failing and repetition. We don’t have much influence on that. We feel it is a school matter.” District office and school have each passed on to the other the responsibility of checking on the implementation of the policy, which resulted in its failure to be implemented.

In Namibia, there was great confusion over who had what role in the hiring of teachers—school board, regional office, or principal. Teachers in Namibia said:

- *Don’t know exactly how it works in the new system. Maybe the person goes directly to the inspector or the regional office. Sometimes the school boards have the right to decide teachers, but maybe the principal just decides if it is only one or two applications.*
- *The regions are the only ones who choose the teachers, but the new gazettes say the school board decides.*
- *Inspectors take lists of applicants to the school after prioritizing them. The list is given to the school board...[and the] school board recommends.*
- *The school board does not get involved with the appointment of teachers. Applications are sent to the inspector and the principal is consulted before a teacher is placed.*

Regional officials said:

- *The community does not have the right to choose teachers. That's the region's responsibility.*
- *The community said that it wanted to choose its own teachers and was angry at the regional office for not accepting their suggestion. The community had approached the teacher about the job, and the teacher had said yes he would move.... This was...behind the principal's back.... You can't steal a teacher from another school.*
- *We don't appoint teachers they [the school board of a former white school] don't want...they would rather go without than have a teacher we appoint.*
- *They recommend and we appoint.*

The various interpretations of how to appoint teachers provide opportunities for schools to manipulate the system to their advantage. For example, school boards that understand that the current policy gives them the right to recommend teachers can actively recruit the new graduates of teacher training colleges and can pressure the regional office to approve their recommendations. Schools and communities that do not understand the process are more inclined to accept any teacher appointed to the school by the regional office.

FORM

In the written communication of policy reforms, in some meetings, and in some media, the language selected for the communication can affect the degree of comprehension. In both Namibia and Malawi, English is the official

Where Policy Hits the Ground

language and the language used to communicate within the education system. In most parts of Malawi, local languages are spoken in the home and village, but most pupils learn Chichewa, which can be used to communicate throughout Malawi (most adults have some ability to use Chichewa). Adults who have completed primary school generally can speak some English, and those who have completed secondary school can usually read, write, and speak English well. Circulars from the education ministry in Malawi are written in English and, due to the amount of education required to become a teacher, most members of the system can easily read and understand the circulars.

In Namibia, local languages are spoken in the home and village in parts of the country that were previously homelands under apartheid. Afrikaans is spoken in white-dominated areas of the country and by members of the older bureaucracy who have remained, and English is spoken by many of the members of the post-independence government who were educated outside of the country. Relatively few members of the education system, however, can speak or read English fluently.

In Namibia, policy circulars have been written in English since 1990, when English was declared the official language of the country, and many members of the education system are unable to understand them. The difficulty members of the education system have had in understanding these circulars has been pointed out in a previous study: “It was clear that they had read the circulars, but they did not understand the policies. More than one person in the regional office in Rundu said that often, although principals receive official

documents, they do not read them because they are incomprehensible” (Fair 1994). Teachers in the three regions in which this research was conducted often indicated the same difficulty with the circulars. One teacher said:

- *They use higher words and they know what level we are. What does it help to send it with hard words? We don't understand, so we won't complete the instructions. Many times they use difficult words and the principal doesn't understand and completes wrong.*

A circuit inspector said:

- *No one understands the circulars. They're in technical English.... All policy circulars should be written in clear, simple English. Since most Namibians are comfortable communicating in Afrikaans, a short translation of the policy should be written in Afrikaans and copied onto the reverse side of the page. This could be done for a short while, just until people get up to speed with their English.*

Even when the language selected for communication is not a problem, the vocabulary used and the manner in which the policy is stated can be a serious obstacle to implementation. The problems in understanding circulars are diminished in Namibia where circulars come equipped with information about where to address inquiries about the policy. Most education personnel in Namibia seem to have a definite idea of where and to whom they would take a question about a policy. In Malawi, policy statements are passed on through the system whether their meaning is clear or not.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

Ministry officer:

- *We assume the district offices understand what we mean, but some of the information is misinterpreted.*

Regional officer:

- *Most district offices are quite capable and are able to decode the circulars by themselves.... We don't need to write clarification if the policy is clear from the ministry.... We may digest a circular that comes from headquarters or we send it as it is.*

District officer:

- *Implementation is hampered because the circulars are brief, exceptionally brief, and we need to expand on it. We meet with the head teachers and explain how to implement.*

Head teacher:

- *They [district officers] can explain the policy but they have no power over the circulars. Sometimes they explain just as it is because they don't know any better than us.*

Conclusions

Some of the barriers to communication are related to the lack of resources to copy, transmit, and store written policies. Central ministries need to make a conscious decision to make resources for better communication available or, if resources cannot be spared, to improve written policy communication and to use other types of communication.

Communication

The main advantage of meetings over circulars for communicating policy is the opportunity provided for discussion, which can increase the understanding of the policy change and provide feedback to policymakers. The main disadvantage lies in the difficulty in finding out about meetings and finding the transportation and facilities necessary to bring people together for a meeting.

The primary benefit of using the media to communicate policy reform is that it reaches beyond the school system to the community. The disadvantages of radio are that information obtained in this manner may not be “official,” and the possibility of political manipulation of the media.

A shortage of resources for communicating policy, whatever the medium, can limit the range of who receives information. Transparency and stakeholder participation in the education system would improve if the policy was simply communicated clearly and in detail to everyone. If this is not possible or practical, then conscious planning of who needs to know what about policy changes is important.

What is communicated in a policy statement may need to be more than what is generally offered. For example, key terms, such as “repeater” or “corporal punishment,” should be fully explained. Who will perform what roles in the implementation process may also need definition. How the statement is communicated is also important, especially in the case of written circulars, where choice of language and writing style can frustrate attempts to understand the policy.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

Before assuming that a policy has failed to be implemented due to either lack of government commitment or resistance to the policy, it is important to understand what obstacles the communication of the policy faced and why that alone—but also in addition to a lack of support or opposition—can lead to a failure to implement what was intended. If communication is taken to mean an understanding of what the policy is and what it is trying to accomplish, then the findings of this study suggest that a substantial part of the policy implementation problem in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa can be traced to communication difficulties.

5. Conclusion

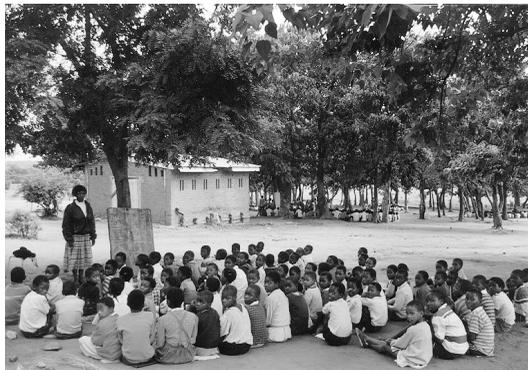
Multiple Barriers to Implementation

Although the last three chapters considered sources of barriers to policy implementation separately in order to provide analytical categories for thinking about where and why policies encounter difficulties, these differences are relative. All policies will probably encounter some degree of resistance, will play themselves out in different ways in the various contexts of the country, and experience some communication difficulties. Most of the policy implementation processes examined in Namibia and Malawi primarily encountered communication, resistance, or variation problems, but some encountered multiple obstacles.

PUPIL TO TEACHER RATIO IN MALAWI

Unlike Namibia, which issued a learner–teacher ratio policy at about the same time with the intent of redistributing teachers to improve the imbalances that had been created under the former apartheid system, the learner–teacher policy in Malawi was intended primarily to provide guidelines on the number of teachers necessary to alleviate the extremely large pupil–teacher ratio in many classes due to population growth and increased enrollment. The pupil–teacher ratio in Malawi was seen as a policy that would be primarily implemented at district offices where the assignment of teachers to

Where Policy Hits the Ground



There are usually far more than sixty pupils in the lower standards of Malawian schools.

teacher assignment, head teachers and teachers at schools rarely remembered receiving a circular about the ratio nor did they recall any meetings about the policy. Community members were almost entirely unaware of the policy.

Head teachers in primary schools assign the teachers sent to their schools according to patterns that vary among different parts of the country and between rural and urban areas, but in almost all cases, are influenced less by an attempt to obtain a class size of approximately sixty pupils than by the demands of the community. Communities, both parents and pupils, judge the success of a school by the number of pupils from that school who are admitted to secondary school. All pupils who were interviewed named this as the primary criterion for selecting a school. Schools where the number of pupils selected

schools is conducted. In many districts enough teachers, both qualified and temporary, have been posted to each school to meet the goals of this policy. Yet in most of the schools visited, some classes had 100 to 400 pupils with a single teacher. While all district personnel interviewed were aware of the pupil–teacher ratio policy and worked from its guidelines in

Conclusion

had dropped also experienced a drop in enrollments. As one teacher said, “Parents view low selection as a dead school.”

To improve chances of more pupils being selected to secondary school, head teachers assign a disproportionate number of the best trained teachers to the higher standards where the number of pupils in each standard is relatively low. This leaves fewer teachers available to cover the lower standards, where the number of pupils are the highest. As a district education officer pointed out, “The head teacher decides how to place the teachers in the classes...standard 8 gets priority. A school may have 300 pupils in standard 1 and 4 teachers in standard 8 who rotate.”

The following distribution of pupils and teachers in a rural Central region school reflects common patterns found in Malawi’s schools.

Table 4: Distribution of Pupils and Teachers by Standard in a Malawian School

Standard	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No. pupils	275	230	177	93	70	39	30	42
No. teachers and sex (M/F)	1(F)*	1(M)	1(M)	1(M)	1(F)	1(M)	1(M)	1(M)
						Head teacher (trained) “floats”		
Trained? (Y/N)	N**	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y

*Female teachers are generally assigned to the lower standards. The rationale generally given by male head teachers is that women are better with the “infants.” As one male teacher said, “The women fight to teach in the higher standards but we feel much better for them to take these [lower] standards.” The female teachers report that “Men won’t teach

Where Policy Hits the Ground

Resistance to the implementation of the policy also came from the teachers. In the Northern region of Malawi, where teachers are more plentiful, most districts are able to assign enough teachers to each school to meet the policy goal. When the district office found that the distribution of these teachers by the head teachers in schools had not led to classes of sixty pupils per teacher, primary education assistants from the district office explained the policy to head teachers when visiting the school and insisted that they readjust their assignments. In a number of these schools in which the 60 to 1 pupil–teacher ratio was implemented, the teachers were reassigned to classes of approximately of sixty pupils. In large urban schools, overcrowded lower standards, classrooms sometimes team taught by several teachers were broken into multiple classes of approximately sixty pupils and a single teacher assigned to each. But many of the teachers soon recombined their classes. As one teacher explained, “Because it was a policy, we had to do it.... Before, we were resting a little bit. When someone was teaching, you were just walking around helping a bit.... It is much work to prepare for all subjects by one teacher. We share to lessen the work.... If I prepare English...the other teacher would do Chichewa.

standard 1. They literally refuse and are given standard 7. It is not our will to teach standard 1. Men say that because we are mothers we can do better at it.”

**The untrained “temporary teachers” who were hired to meet the increases in enrollment associated with the “free education” of the new government are generally assigned to the lower standards, while the trained teachers are concentrated in the upper standards where their skills are believed to be necessary for exam preparation.

Conclusion

We stayed for two weeks handling each class by ourselves before we started sharing again.”

Communication of the policy was primarily directed to the district office, while head teachers, teachers, and communities all had expectations and practices upon which this policy had an effect. If these parts of the system had been informed of the policy and understood the goal, then their cooperation and support might have been gained and the policy might have been implemented in the manner envisioned by the government. However, in addition to too little effort going into communication of the policy, the policy also encountered resistance from head teachers, teachers, and communities when implementation threatened their values and standard practices. The uneven distribution of teachers among the regions of Malawi has meant that different implementation obstacles have also been encountered in different regions. District offices have been unable to assign enough teachers to all but urban schools in the Southern region, while Northern schools frequently have been assigned enough teachers to meet the ratio but have distributed them unevenly within the school. The interaction of communication problems, unanticipated opposition, and contextual variations in the problems encountered have meant that, although the policy has been implemented, the results have had little effect on the problem the policy was intended to address.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

Summary

This research has described what happens to some policies after they are issued in two sub-Saharan African countries with the hope of helping policymakers understand what can be done to improve the implementation of their policies. Throughout this study, what has appeared with great consistency has been the need to: 1) anticipate implementation barriers through research, pilot studies, etc. and plan a strategy for overcoming those barriers; 2) provide opportunities for feedback about the implementation process and develop flexible responses; and 3) assume responsibility for policy implementation as well as policymaking. In addition to these basic recommendations, and the effort to describe implementation processes, this study also categorized obstacles to implementation, which can serve as a reference to guide the process of planning the implementation of future policies. These obstacles are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Barriers to Implementation

TYPE	QUESTION	POSSIBILITIES	STRATEGIES
Communication	To whom communicated?	Regional/District Principal/Headteacher Teachers Community	Broader audience leads to transparency plus support and assistance of wider spectrum of society.
	Appropriate type of communication?	Circular Meeting Media	Tradeoff according to need to provide: the same policy message for all; a record of the policy; a comprehensible policy message; and discussion of the policy.
	What communicated?	Content: definitions, roles, responsibilities. Form: language, complexity.	Increase clarity.
Resistance	Due to cultural values?	According to ethnic group; according to class (such as held by educated elites or rural poor); or held throughout society	Communication and public debate to examine benefits for change.
	Due to shifts in power?	Girls vs boys; school vs community; region vs region; ethnic group vs ethnic group	Define roles and responsibilities, negotiate rewards and modify losses.
Variation in context	Rural–urban differences?	Education, skills, attitudes, distance, work demands, etc.	Prior planning and monitoring implementation processes.
	Demographic or social differences?	Too low or too great a population; cultural values opposed to policy.	Prior planning and monitoring implementation processes.
	Differences in where-withal?	Lack of transportation, materials, personnel, skills.	Prior planning and monitoring implementation processes.
	Differences in social organization?	Local structure of relationships supports or hinders implementation.	Prior planning and monitoring implementation processes.

Appendix: Methodology

A collaborative process of identifying policies to be examined took place among the research team, the ministries of education in each country, and USAID missions in both countries. An effort was made to identify and select policies that would provide an opportunity for comparison and contrast. In addition, policies were selected that involved multiple implementation levels, moving beyond regional and district levels into the school and community during the implementation process.

Careful consideration was given to the selection of regions, districts, and schools that would be visited, a collaborative process involving officials at all levels of the education system. Ministry officials in both countries expressed a great deal of interest in the overall design of the study as well as the policies whose implementation would be studied. For this reason, site selection was carefully considered and negotiated.

Two research assistants collected the data. Data for this study were collected in Namibia from September to December 1995, and in Malawi from May to August 1996. These dates correspond to the dry seasons in both countries and allowed researchers easier access to the more remote schools. Informal, open-ended interviews were conducted in central, regional, and district offices of the education system, with principal or head teachers and with teachers, and with as many community members as feasible.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

Table 6: Number of Interviews Conducted

	Malawi	Namibia
Regional	11	20
District/circuit	23	2
Head teacher/principal	22	25
Teacher	34	46
Community	34	4
Total	124	97

The difference between the number and types of interviews conducted in the two countries is due, primarily, to the addition of an assistant in Malawi who was able to carry out interviews in a number of local languages with school board members, girls who had returned to school after having a child, and other appropriate community members. Other than these interviews, all interviews were conducted in English.

Primary documentation used to support the interview data included policy circulars, pamphlets, and brochures; head teacher and school committee manuals; discipline handbooks; training schedules and materials; USAID and other multilateral and bilateral reports and documents; court case documents; statistical reports; and policy statements providing background information about the policies themselves, the policy environments influencing policy formation, and the strategies and environments for implementing policy changes.

References

Craig, J. 1990. *Comparative African Experiences in Implementing Education Policies*, World Bank Discussion Papers, Africa Technical Department Series, No. 83. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Grindle, Merilee and John Thomas. 1991. *Public Choice and Policy Change: The Political Economy of Reform in Developing Countries*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

Fair, Kristi. 1994. *Passing and Failing Learners: Policies and Practices in Ondangwa and Rundu in Grades 1 to 3*, Volumes I and II. Windhoek, Namibia: Ministry of Education and Culture/UNICEF.

National Commission on Women in Development. 1990. "A Report of a Workshop on Increasing Access of Girls and Women in Education and Training Opportunities in Malawi." Lilongwe, Malawi: USAID.

Psacharopoulos, G. 1990. *Why Educational Policies Can Fail: An Overview of Selected African Experiences*, World Bank Discussion Papers No. 82. Africa Technical Department Series. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Where Policy Hits the Ground

Republic of Malawi. 1994. *Basic Education Statistics for Malawi 1994*. Lilongwe, Malawi: Ministry of Education

Republic of Namibia. 1990. “Improving the Efficiency of Education Systems Bulletin,” Summer. Windhoek, Namibia: Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport.

Robinson, Brandon, Jean Davison, and Jim Williams. 1994. “Malawi Education Policy Sector Analysis.” Lilongwe, Malawi: USAID.

Rondinelli, Dennis. 1994. *Development Projects as Policy Experiments: An Adaptive Approach to Development administration*. London and New York: Rontledge.

Williams, Jim. 1995. “Reducing Repetition in Malawi’s Primary Schools Draft.” Prepared for the Ministry of Education, Lilongwe, Malawi.

Wolf, Joyce. 1995. *Analysis of USAID Programs To Improve Equity in Malawi and Ghana’s Education Systems*, Africa Bureau Office of Sustainable Development. Washington, DC: USAID.



For further information or additional copies, please contact

Africa Bureau Information Center
1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Suite 1425
Washington, DC 20004-1703

Tel: 202-661-5827

Fax: 202-661-5890

E-mail: abic@rrs.cdie.org

ABEL Clearinghouse for Basic Education
1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009-5721

Tel: 202-884-8288

Fax: 202-884-8408

E-mail: abel@aed.org

