



PARENT-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS FOR EDUCATION TOOLKIT

TRAINING MODULES FOR SECTOR EDUCATION OFFICERS



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INTRODUCTION

Every child needs an enabling environment that supports his or her learning. Schools alone cannot be responsible for the educational experience of children – this is the shared responsibility of schools, parents, and community members. Given the minimal time that children actually spend in school, interactions with family and community members are likely to have more regular impact on a child’s learning and development than school-based interactions.

When the partnership between parent and the school is not well-established, there is little parental support provided to the students or school. Many parents do not feel invested in the school activities, as they do not participate in SGA meetings and were not involved in the initial school improvement plan. It is also common to find parents who do not follow up on their child’s attendance in school or learning progress. This lack of parental engagement leads to drop out or excessive repetition of grades and poor academic performance of students.

Studies show that schools are more successful when supported by parents and communities.¹

While most school leadership would recognize that increasing parental involvement contributes to school success, the awareness of how to forge strong partnerships is often limited.

This toolkit highlights best practices for effectively developing parent-school relationships that support students’ learning both in and out of school. It acknowledges that school leadership and parents must commit to working together in order to realize these practices. For this reason, the following modules should be completed collaboratively between the Head Teacher and the SGAC leadership on a monthly basis. Each module is likely to take about 2-3 hours of time, with a follow-up assignment to be completed over the course of the month.

The Sector Education Officer will also receive this toolkit and will be monitoring progress. He/she will be following up on the completion of the modules and the specified assignment. The SEO and other educational partners will also be looking generally at how your school is making progress towards fostering parent-school partnerships so be prepared to share success stories, challenges and feedback.

The modules included in this toolkit are:

1. Sharing Responsibility
2. Active Participation in the School Life
3. Communicating effectively
4. Supporting Learning
5. Ensuring Equity and Inclusion
6. Collaborating with community

1 Epstein, J. L., et al. (2009). School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, second edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

MODULE 1.

SHARING RESPONSIBILITY

KEY MESSAGE: Parents and school leadership are partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

A balanced approach to school decision-making and parental involvement creates a sense of shared responsibility among parents, community members, teachers and school leaders. In turn, shared responsibility:

- Ensures that parents' values and interests are heard and respected;
- Allows for more engaged and supportive parents;
- Makes the school more accountable to its community.

ICEBREAKER:

Discuss with the group the ways your parents supported your learning when you were young.

Photo credit: Natasha Nishimwe



This module focuses on one essential goal: **Strengthening parents' voice in shared decision making.** Parents must be fully involved in issues affecting their children, both at school and within the local community. This will require active participation of all parents in a well-organized School General Assembly (SGA). It will involve strong parent leaders to take influential roles in the School General Assembly Committees (SGACs). Strong SGACs will listen to the priorities of both the parents and the school.

REFLECTION: What do you believe is the role and purpose of the School General Assembly (SGA)?



SCHOOL GENERAL ASSEMBLY SELF-EVALUATION:

Decide how frequently each SGA member attends SGA meetings at your school.

SGA Membership:					
HOW OFTEN THESE MEMBERS PARTICIPATE IN MEETINGS	ALL THE TIME	REGULARLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
All the parents whose children attend the school					
Legal guardians to those children who have no parents					
The Head Teacher of that school, who is also the secretary					
The other School Administration members					
All of the teachers					
Two elected students (one boy and one girl)					
The owner of the school					
Sector Education Officer (SEO)					
The Village leader					
The Cell leader					

IN TERMS OF PARENTS PARTICIPATION IN SGA MEETINGS:	ALL THE TIME	REGULARLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
Men and women (in equally representation)					
Parents with disabilities					
Illiterate parents					
Parents of high and low social economic status (in equal representation)					

Compare your responses to your colleague. In which areas did you have different perspectives? What areas do we need to strengthen? How might we do this?

EMPOWERED PARENT-LEADERS: WELL-FUNCTIONING SCHOOL GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES (SGAC)

The School General Assembly Committee (SGAC) is the level of the School General Assembly that is in charge of putting into action the decisions of the School General Assembly.

THE SGAC MEMBERS ARE:

- The President
- The Vice President
- The owner of the school, or a representative
- The school Head Teacher who is also the secretary
- Two advisors elected by the parents
- Two teachers (a man and a woman) representing all teachers, elected by the body of teachers
- Two students (a boy and a girl) representing the students, also elected by the students

SGAC should meet once a term. Whenever necessary, the SGAC can hold a special meeting.



Photo credit: Nishimwe Natasha



ACTIVITY: Discuss the responsibilities of the SGAC members listed above. Complete the table below.

SGAC Member	Responsibilities
President	✎
Vice President	
Owner of the school/their representative	
Head Teacher	
Advisors	
Teachers	
Students	

SGAC/SCHOOL LEADER RELATIONSHIP

Studies show that better-achieving schools have higher levels of trust between school staff and parents, while schools with the lowest achievement rates have minimal trust. This is why members of SGAC must have a close working relationship with the school leadership. When this relationship is not well managed it can create conflicts in the school. Some of the problems which can occur are:

- Some SGAC members such as the school owner or President, do excessive supervision of school activities
- School leaders plan and implement all activities without involving other SGAC members
- Parent voices are not heard because elected parent representatives are also teachers or school staff
- The elected committee are based solely on the opinions of the school Head Teacher
- Only the Head Teacher and SGAC president are involved in school activities. Other members of the SGAC are not involved.



DISCUSS: Evaluate the working relationships in your school. How can you improve them? Write 3 strategies.



CASE STORY: Have two volunteers read the case stories for Parent A and Parent B.

Parent A: Last year my child repeated Primary One. I am interested in supporting my child's learning so he can do better, but I am not sure how. I take part in the SGA meetings, but they seem to be rarely held. The Head Teacher appears to be very busy and I don't think she has time to work with the SGAC. The SGAC parent representatives are also teachers, so I don't feel as if I can approach them with my issues. I decide to stay out of the school affairs and trust that the teachers will help my child to do better this year.

Parent B: Last year my child repeated Primary One. I heard that many other children in the same class also repeated. Together with my child's teacher, we raised our concern during the SGA meeting. The SGAC President took note of the issue and a committee was elected to investigate the causes of excessive repetition of students identifying barriers both in and out of school. In the next SGA meeting, the committee presented the findings. Based on this, the SGAC made an action plan to resolve this challenge, and a special SGA meeting was called to share it. Parents gave feedback on the improvement measures and responsibilities were clearly laid out. School leaders, teachers and parents collaborated on the improvement plan, and progress was monitored.

Parent A and Parent B describe different experiences with the school. Which type of experience is more common in Rwanda? What do parents at your school often do when their children are not succeeding at school? What can school leaders and SGAC do to improve this?



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Read the listed ideas for what parents and schools can do to strengthen cooperation and parental engagement. Then write one more idea you have.

What Parents and Parent Leaders Can Do	What School Leaders and Staff Can Do
Working in partnership with the head teacher, identify ways the SGA can support one or more goals of the school improvement plan	Present the school projects and plans to parents and value their inputs.
Participate actively in various SGA committees and other temporary committees formed to resolve identified issues as they arise.	Involve all parents/guardians in decision making.
Encourage parents to participate in SGA meetings and arrive on time.	Ensure SGA meetings are well planned and involve all SGA members.
Encourage women to communicate their ideas in meetings and to assume SGAC leadership responsibilities.	Communicate the importance of women having equal representation in terms of leadership and voice.
Ensure there is diverse parent representation in SGAC, including parents of children at different grade levels, gender, social economic status or disability.	Empower SGAC members to effectively assume their responsibilities.
Throughout the year, publicly recognize committed teachers and appreciate their efforts.	Recognize parents who participate actively in SGA meetings and contribute to the school improvement plan.
	

Monthly Assignment: Collaborating to Organize After-School Learning Opportunities

SGAC and school leaders can do a great deal to promote school-community learning opportunities outside of school hours. To bring this into practice, together you will work towards identifying two Literacy Champions, or community literacy volunteers. These community volunteers will be supported by SGAC and Head Teachers to promote literacy in the community, through reading activities and parent sensitization.

Be sensitive to social inclusion. Don't exclude anyone based on gender, disability, socioeconomic status or family background.

ROLE OF LITERACY CHAMPIONS

- Serve as literacy community focal point
- Lead reading club sessions for P1-P3 children
- Manage book collections for use in reading clubs
- Work with urugerero youth to promote literacy in the community
- Sensitize community members on the importance of literacy
- Collaborate with parents to enhance their capacity to support children's literacy development
- Be involved in the application of Community literacy Funds
- Collaborate with school leadership and SGAC to organize reading festivals

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF THE LITERACY CHAMPION

- Be committed to volunteer and work with children and parents
- Be able to read Kinyarwanda fluently, expressively and with full comprehension
- Have enough time available to perform the literacy activities
- Be an honest and respectable member of the community
- Be residents of the village of school location
- Not be a member of SGAC
- Aged between 18 & 60 years
- Be dynamic, active and energetic

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING LITERACY CHAMPIONS

- Each school community will elect two Literacy Champions. Ideally, one male and one female is selected
- Election of the Literacy Champion will be done in the village meeting
- The village leader will lead Literacy Champion elections, supported by SGAC chairperson and Head teacher
- The Executive Secretary of the Cell will be invited to the selection meeting or if not available, provide a report to him/her indicating the selected volunteers
- In the meeting the Community will be informed about the roles and responsibilities of the Literacy Champion
- In the meeting, community designate a safe place where the reading club will be located.


Assignment of the SGAC President, Vice President and Head Teacher

TICK EACH ACTIVITY AS IT IS COMPLETED

- Share with the Village Chief the responsibilities and selection criteria of Literacy Champions listed above.
- Attend selection meeting and support Village Chief in the election of Literacy Champions.
- Ensure that the selected Literacy Champions fulfill the criteria.
- Announce the elected Literacy Champions in school meetings.
- Work closely with the Literacy Champions to identify a secure and accessible place where the books and mats can be stored.
- Ensure that the selected venue for conducting reading club is safe and friendly for children.
- Sensitize parents in the surrounding school village to send their children in lower primary grades to reading clubs.
- Visit reading clubs and provide feedback and encouragement to the Literacy Champions.
- Support the Literacy Champion to plan other literacy activities involving the school and parents.

REPORT TO SHARE WITH SEO

A.

Name of community members elected Literacy Champions	Gender	Telephone
1. 		
2.		

B. VENUE FOR THE READING CLUB:



C. FEEDBACK ON THE FIRST READING CLUB VISITED:



D. ADDITIONAL ACTIONS TAKEN BY SGAC SCHOOL LEADERSHIP OR LITERACY CHAMPIONS TO SUPPORT LITERACY AND READING IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY:



SEO GUIDE

MODULE 1: SHARING RESPONSIBILITY

As SEOs, there are many responsibilities to fulfil in order to strengthen the quality of education. One of the most significant SEO duties is related to the oversight of SGACs. SEOs are obliged to support schools and conduct school supervision visits and monitor the role and involvement of SGACs by:

- Organizing regular meetings with school leadership and collaborating with school committees (i.e. SGACs) on school plans and activities
- Discussing and reporting issues or problems related to the school and programs

SELF-EVALUATION:

Think about common practices in your sector. Indicate the extent to which the following statements are valid.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOME SCHOOLS	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
I fully understand the structure and different responsibilities of the SGAC.					
I feel confident in my ability to support SGACs to function effectively.					
SGACs in my sector are well established and members know their responsibilities.					
I get regular reports from schools about SGAC and SGA meetings.					
I know the general rules governing nursery, primary and secondary schools.					

REFLECTING ON THE CONTENT OF MODULE ONE: What are the common areas of difficulty for the schools in your sector? Where do the SGACs need extra support to function effectively?



CASE STORY: Read the case study and underline some of the key ways this SEO supported the SGACs and her schools.

Marie-Louise is a SEO with a large number of schools in her sector. She has had a range of successes and challenges around the effective running of SGACs. She noticed that school leaders and SGACs were struggling with sharing responsibilities. HTs felt SGACs would only come to meetings to receive money, but were not concerned with how to support the school and staff. SGACs felt frustrated that head teachers who would misuse capitation grants without consulting with the SGAC how the money would be best used.

Marie-Louise decided to focus her efforts on strengthening the SGACs in her sector. She made a clear target in her *imihigo* and sector plan. She began attending at least one meeting per term with the school leader and president of the SGAC in each school. She discussed the school's progress and advised on any issues the SGAC were facing.

Marie Louise also committed to ensuring that SGACs in her sector knew how to contact the other SGACs in their sector. She requested them to share ideas and learn from each other.

Both the SGACs and school leaders communicated their appreciation that Marie-Louise was consistently available to offer support and advice. Within two terms Marie Louise was amazed at how much more effective SGACs were in her sector. They met regularly and had more participation from the parent leaders. She also noted how many more people from the wider community became interested and engaged in education activities. She found that SGAC's from nearby schools were visiting each other. She observed the Executive Secretary and local leaders inviting SGAC members to talk about school-community collaboration in their local meetings and during *umuganda*. By the following year, Marie-Louise noted that all of the SGACS were involved in the school improvement planning process, and were active in ensuring it was successfully implemented.


In this case story, what are some of the changes the SEO observed that indicated the SGAC's in her sector were becoming more effective?



THE ROLE OF THE SEO

Read the four ideas about how SEOs can support school-community partnerships. Then identify three more strategies that you could apply.

1. Create time to meet with the school leader and SGAC to share about progress and challenges.
2. Encourage school leaders and SGACs members to collaborate in organizing after-school learning opportunities such as community reading clubs.
3. Create linkages for learning between SGACs from different schools.
4. Help the SGAC, school leadership and teachers find ways to value each other and communicate their appreciation.

5.  _____

6.  _____

7.  _____



Photo credit: Natasha Nishimwe

SEO Assignment

TICK EACH ACTIVITY AS IT IS COMPLETED

- Organize and facilitate the face to face training for Head Teachers and SGACs on the Module One: Sharing Responsibilities.

- Follow up with HTs and SGACs to support in the selection of Literacy Champions. Collect their reports with information on the selection of Literacy Champions.

- Visit a community-based reading club led by Literacy Champions.

- Conduct school visits to provide advice on how they are implementing what they learnt from the Module One training.

- Use e-mail and SMS messages to report progress and successes in relation to strengthening school-community partnerships. Also identify challenges and planned strategies for overcoming them.

NOTES



MODULE 2.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE SCHOOL LIFE

KEY MESSAGE: Parents are active participants in the life of the school, and feel valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning in class.

There is a great deal of research indicating that parent involvement in school activities results in improved student achievement. The more the parent interacts with the teacher, school curriculum, and administration, the more positive the parent feels about the school. As parents learn about the way the school functions, understand the educational process and decisions, they feel more connected to the school and confident to support their children's educational journey.

School leadership and SGACs should make additional efforts to ensure that parents from various backgrounds, including those who are illiterate, disabled or from lower socioeconomic status, also participate in school life. These parents are often excluded or feel they aren't able to contribute. They need encouragement and support from school leadership and parent peers in order to guarantee there are inclusive opportunities for them to be involved in their child's education.

ICEBREAKER:
Discuss ways parents and community members can participate in the school life.

Photo credit: Natasha Nishimwe



This module focuses on two key goals: Creating a Welcoming School Environment and Building a Respectful, Inclusive School Community.

REFLECTION: What might be the barriers to active engagement by parents? What strategies might you use to overcome these barriers?

Parents living with disabilities often face unique challenges and require additional support to ensure they are able to participate.

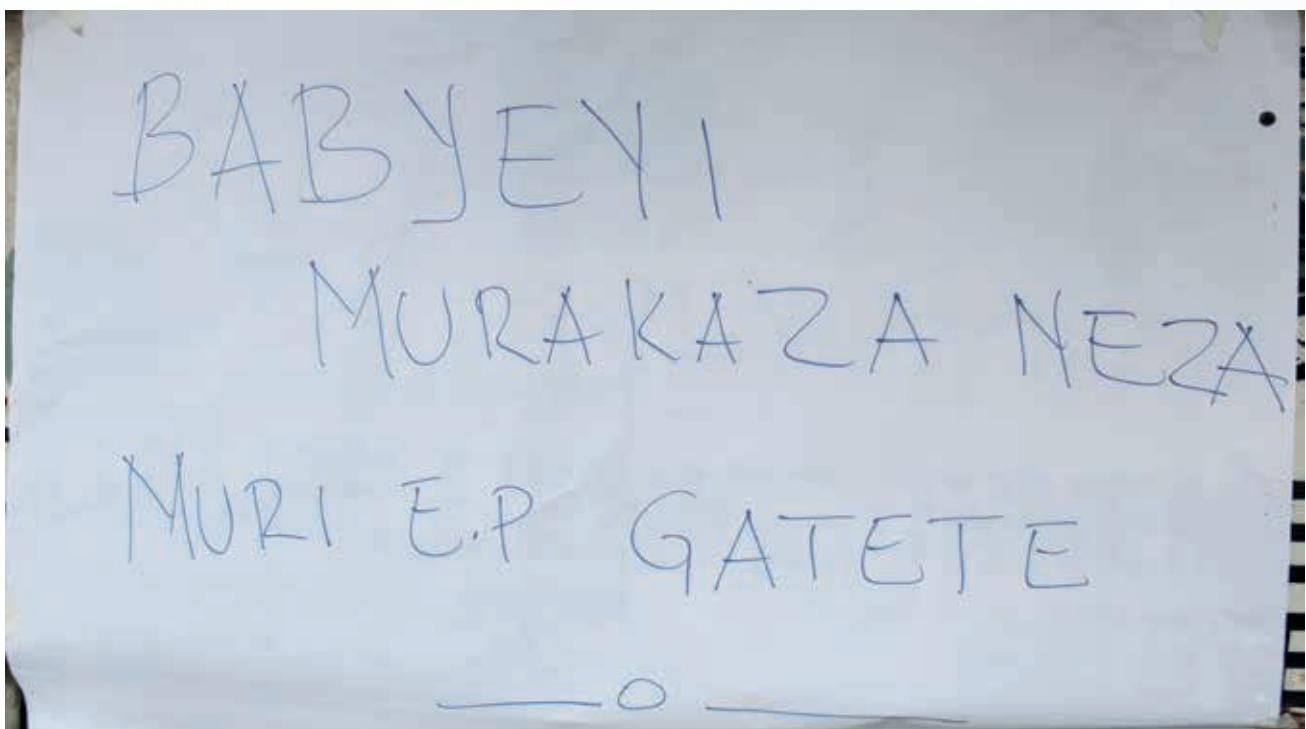


PARENT INVOLVEMENT SELF EVALUATION: Individually decide how frequently your school reflects these practices.

Our School	ALL THE TIME	REGULARLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
Is clean and has indications to direct visitors to the classrooms, reception and the head teachers' office					
Provides parents with an orientation about the school at the start of the school year					
Offers a range of different opportunities, and flexible times for parental engagement					
Is able, with community support, to identify marginalized parents and where appropriate, to encourage participation					
Is able, with community support, to identify the barriers that prevent parents from participating actively in the school community					
Has a set of strategies established by the SGA on how to involve and support marginalized parents					

Parents	ALL THE TIME	REGULARLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
Feel welcomed when they come to school					
Participate in setting school direction, including the development of the School Improvement Plan					
Where appropriate, have opportunities to observe classroom activities and their child's engagement					
Volunteer in different activities at school on a regular basis					
Are well informed and know what is happening in the school					
Participate in school events and activities					


Compare your responses to your colleague. In which areas did you have different perspectives? What areas of parent-school activity are we strong? What areas do we need to strengthen? How might we do this?



BEST PRACTICES FOR INVOLVING PARENTS IN SCHOOL LIFE

There are many practices a school can employ to create an inviting atmosphere that encourages parents to participate in the school life.

CREATING A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT


- Provide a display space for important information
 - » Contact information for the school administrators, teachers, SGAC president
 - » School calendar / important dates and events
 - » Announcements
- Invite parents to visit the school
 - » Through village meetings and umuganda share times when the head teacher will be available at school for communication/meeting (e.g. Friday morning)
 - » Encourage parents to visit during break and lunch times when staff are more available
 - » Coordinate school tours and orientation for new parents
- Ensuring physical space is made available for parent coordination and activities
- Provide disability & gender sensitive access to buildings (classrooms, offices and toilets)
-  _____

It is important to share information with parents in Kinyarwanda so that they are able to fully understand the content.


Photo credit: Natasha Nishimwe



PARENT-FRIENDLY STAFF

- Support office staff and teachers to be:
 - » Open and welcoming to parents
 - » Communicating information (POSITIVES not just problems)
 - » Encourage participation
 - » Responsive to parents and their needs/requests
- SGAC and school staff collaborate to invite parents to help to organize or attend school celebrations for school events or for international holidays such as World read aloud day, World Book Day, Labor day, Day of the African Child, World Teacher Day.
-  _____

PARENT-FRIENDLY POLICIES

- Working with SGAC and other parents, the school staff can develop and publicly post a parent-school partnership policy that explains the school's commitment to involvement of parents in school activities and parents' commitment to the school and its staff.
- Ensuring the SGAC and parents perspectives are included when developing the school's improvement plan. This will ensure their perspectives are reflected and that they have ownership of the plan and can support its implementation.
-  _____

PARENT PARTICIPATION POLICY

We encourage all parents to visit the school and to observe their child's classroom, talk with the class teacher about the progress of the child, and talk to the head teacher about your ideas for improving our school. We request only that prior notice be given and that visitors check in at the office upon arrival.

CASE STORY: Have a volunteer read the case story aloud.

I am an SGAC president in a school where most parents are not involved in children’s learning. The School General Assembly meeting occurs but only 40% of the parents usually attend.



In the SGAC meeting, we brainstormed how parents can be encouraged to volunteer in the school. We identified areas where the school could use support from parents. Everyone in the SGAC was given a village in which he/she became a focal point to go to work with the village chief in sensitizing parents on the importance of volunteering in school activities. We shared different areas where volunteers were needed. Parents were asked about their interest and availability to volunteer. Everyone indicated the type of activities they would like to support and a schedule based on her/his availability, including at least one volunteer day per term. Some parents committed to more frequent volunteer visits, even on a weekly basis.

As a result, parents from all levels of socio-economic background started to volunteer in different school activities. Literate parents planned visits to read with P1, P2 and P3 students who are at risk of repeating. Artistic parents supported teachers to make classroom displays, such as alphabet or number charts. Parents who knew how to sew helped repair books and other ripped learning materials. Others who had building experience, helped to make the new pre-primary classrooms more child-friendly by adjusting desk height to fit smaller children. The parents got the opportunity to know each other through their volunteering efforts which improved parents’ communication and support network. As a result of this success, we organized an end-of-the-year event to celebrate our achievements.

Based on the examples provided in the case story and in the previous activity description, identify 5 areas where your parent volunteers could support your school improvement plan.



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

What Parents and Parent Leaders Can Do	What School Leaders and Staff Can Do
SGAC identify and share ways to make all families feel welcome and involved	Be accessible and available to the parents
Visit children at school and in classroom	Ensure that the front office staff are friendly, recognize and assist visitors immediately, as well as answer the phone regularly
Mentor new parents and other parents who need support or encouragement to be involved	Explore the feasibility of establishing cooperatives or other financial activities to support disadvantaged families
SGAC identify different talents from the parents and share it with the school	Share with parents the needs for the school in volunteerism
Establish and monitor parent volunteer program	Establish and monitor parent volunteer program
SGAC reach out parents who are not involved and encourage participation in SGA meetings and school activities	Value and include every parent regardless social economic background
Participate in school events and support planning and organization when necessary	Inform the parents and the community what is happening in school and encourage participation
SGAC ensures significant parent involvement in the school improvement plan	Invite parents to be involved in developing the school improvement plan
Recognize the special constraints on parents with disabilities, and share with the school strategies to involve those parents in the school activities	Discuss with SGAC members strategies to involve parents with disabilities in the school activities
SGAC members carefully think through the difference between engaging mothers and fathers and how to effectively mobilize the wider parent community maximum engagement	Think through the difference between engaging mothers and fathers and how to effectively mobilize the wider parent community maximum engagement
	

Monthly Assignment: Establish a Parent Volunteer Program

- With the SGAC and parents identify areas where parent volunteers could support the school and children's learning. Consider providing additional parent volunteers in the pre-primary and lower primary years which often have the biggest class sizes.
- Choose a volunteer coordinator: For different sections (primary section, or even distinguishing between lower primary section), select a parent volunteer coordinator to survey all parents about their talents, interests and availability to volunteer.
- Offer a variety of times to volunteer. Parents have different schedules, therefore, there should be flexibility in scheduling volunteering activities.
- Communicate volunteer opportunities throughout the year so that parents and community members who come to school mid-year can be made aware of the volunteer opportunities and become connected with the school community.
- Use Parent Volunteer Form (Appendix B) to document information.
- Recognize parent volunteers in school by providing them a certificate of merit, a thank you note, or recognize their work during public school meetings. When their efforts are recognized, it increases their motivation and retention in volunteerism.
- Communicate achievements from parents' volunteerism with the parents themselves to show them results from their efforts. If a child's reading has improved with support from a parent volunteer, communicate this improvement to ensure parents know that their contributions are important and worthwhile.
- Produce a report on the parent volunteer activities conducted to share with the SEO.
- See Appendix A for a list of practical ideas for parent volunteer activities.

A volunteer program is not mandatory for parents. There is no compensation, only the shared benefit of supporting the school and students.



Photo credit: Natasha Nishimwe

APPENDIX A:

PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR PARENT VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

- Support after school activities like reading clubs, sports and culture activities
- Make class displays, like alphabet or number charts
- Repair textbooks, storybooks or other teaching and learning materials
- Construct new classrooms or rehabilitate old ones
- Plant trees in the school compound
- Assist in planning and organizing different school events
- Give presentations in classes or at assemblies about their specializations and skills in different domains (safety, hygiene, etc.)
- Provide one-on-one support to struggling learners or children with disabilities who could benefit individualized attention
- Identify children in the community who have dropped out of school and working with school staff to reach out to them
- Volunteer during lessons to support group or project work
- Read to children or listen to children read
- Support on inventory of books and other learning and teaching materials in the store room or library
- Create play materials for pre-primary classrooms

Photo credit: Colin Crowley



APPENDIX B:

PARENT VOLUNTEER FORM

Parent Volunteer Form				
PARENT NAME	CHILD'S CLASS	AREAS OF INTEREST	AVAILABILITY	BEST WAY TO CONTACT

SEO GUIDE

MODULE 2: ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE SCHOOL LIFE

As SEOs, we have to strive to improve the quality of education in to all schools in the Sector. SEOs can do a great deal by ensuring that parents are involved in the school life as one pillar of improving children’s learning success.

- Organizing regular meetings with school leadership and collaborating with school committees (i.e. SGACs) on school plans and activities
- Discussing and reporting issues or problems related to the school and programs

SELF-EVALUATION:

Think about common practices in your sector. Indicate the extent to which the following statements are valid.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOME SCHOOLS	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Most parents participate in the school activities and functions.					
I regularly provide school leadership with practical ideas on how to involve parents in the school life.					
I regularly attend community events and sensitize parents on the benefits of participating in school functions.					
Schools provide regular reports on issues related to parental engagement.					

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOME SCHOOLS	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Schools have established parent volunteer programs or other efforts to involve parents in the school life.					
Schools share experience on best practices of involving parents in the school life.					

REFLECTING ON THE CONTENT OF MODULE TWO: What are the main reasons parents are often not involved in the school activities and functions?



Photo credit: Colin Crowley



CASE STORY: Read the case study and underline some of the key ways this SEO supported the SGACs and her schools.

As an SEO, I faced a challenge of schools in my sector consistently having challenges with low academic achievement. I analyzed the results of the students' exams and found that the performance was poor mainly for children in lower primary. I talked about the issue with Executive Secretary of the sector. We then we invited stakeholders in Education to discuss the issue and to identify solutions. A range of participants attended the meeting, including head teachers, parent representatives, school owners, village leaders and Cell Executive Secretaries, as well as some representatives from local businesses. We discussed the issues hindering children's success in our sector, including the workload of school staff and lack of parental engagement.

In the meeting, we identified several productive ideas to address these issues. We incorporated the strategies into a sector improvement plan. It focused on supporting schools to improve children's learning through increasing parental involvement in the school life. I shared with head teachers best practices for involving parents in the school life, and together we identified practical ideas of activities parents can support by volunteering their time. We also discussed how parents can get information about the volunteer program in schools through awareness meetings in the village, in the cell, in SGA meetings and in Umuganda.

Several schools established a parent volunteer program. It allowed teachers to have additional support in the classroom and to be able to use more student-centered methodologies. This improved teacher motivation. Parents also became more interested in what children were learning in school. They were more involved in ensuring children complete their homework, study for exams and read recreationally. The volunteer program was successful and the support of parents in the school activities led to more regular collaboration. As a result, children's learning began to improve.

What kind of support can you provide to schools to ensure that parents are participating actively in the school life? Consider the reasons you listed in the first question of this module.








THE ROLE OF THE SEO

Read the four ideas about how SEOs can support school-community partnerships. Then identify three more strategies that you could apply.

1. Support schools to establish parent volunteer programs.
2. Sensitize parents in different sector meetings to participate willingly in the school volunteer program. Consider special constraints on parents with disabilities and other vulnerable families and strategies on how to ensure that they get involved.
3. Organize study tours between the schools to learn about successful parent volunteer programs.
4. Give feedback to the schools about their report on school volunteer program and recognize the effort of parents during different events.

5.  _____
6.  _____
7.  _____

SEO Assignment

TICK EACH ACTIVITY AS IT IS COMPLETED

- Follow up to ensure that Head Teachers and SGACs completed Module 2: Active participation in the school life.
- Monitor the measures taken by Head Teachers and SGACs to create a collaborative relationship between schools and parents.
- Follow up on Head Teachers and SGACs progress towards establishing a parent volunteer program.
- Visit the schools to see how their volunteer programs are working to improve children’s learning.
- Use e-mail and SMS messages to report progress and successes in relation to strengthening school-community partnerships. Also identify challenges and planned strategies for overcoming them.

NOTES



MODULE 3.

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

KEY MESSAGE: Parents and school staff communicate regularly about student's learning and welfare.

Effective and regular communication between home and school is the foundation of solid partnership. The more parents and school share relevant information with each other about students' learning, the better equipped they both will be to help the children to become successful. Effective communication means that school and parents communicate on a consistent basis and that communication is built on open and honest dialogue. All parents should feel that the school keeps them informed on important issues and that it is easy to communicate with teachers, the head teacher, and other school staff. Parents also need to listen to, acknowledge, and respond to the communication from school. If teachers reach out about a child's behavior or performance, they need parental support. They can't do it alone.

Many schools only use one-way communication that is usually school-directed. The school transfers information but parents aren't offered to participate in the process or don't have opportunities to provide feedback. On the other hand, two-way communication involves parents and schools both communicating. Information is shared and the parents' opinions are taken into consideration. This approach is conducive to create an open and productive partnership.

ICEBREAKER:

Discuss the challenges school staff and parents face when communicating with each other.



Photo credit: Natasha Nishimwe

REFLECTION: Does your school offer many different ways to communicate with parents? Is the way you communicate helping you to strengthen working relationships with parents/school?

Successful schools both initiate communication to parents as well as ensure they are responsive to parents' communication.



PARENT-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION SELF-EVALUATION: Individually, decide how frequently your school and parent community reflects these practices.

Our School	ALL THE TIME	REGULARLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
Communicates all school information about current events or meetings to parents at least one week in advance					
Has established multiple-communication channels to ensure that all parents, including illiterate, disabled or marginalized parents can access information					
Ensures the school administration has contact information for all parents					
Encourages and monitors teachers' regular communication with parents					
Provides opportunities for parents to communicate ideas during SGA meetings					
Has established a system for providing information to the parents who were not able to attend SGA meeting					
Shares information with SGAC about school challenges and current events relevant to students and parents					

Parents	ALL THE TIME	REGULARLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
Visit school to communicate with teachers or leadership about the child's learning, wellbeing or behavior					
Respond to communication from the teacher/school when appropriate					
Inform the school of absence or lateness of the child					
Majority attend the school meeting or events					
Regularly communicate amongst each other about shared issues affecting their children's learning					
Take initiative to support illiterate or disabled parents to communicate with school staff					

Compare your responses to your colleague. What areas did you have different perspectives? What areas is your parent-school community strong? What areas need to be strengthened?

KEY COMMUNICATION ISSUES


Any issue affecting the child's learning, development or well-being should be communicated by both the parents and school. These can include:

- Student disabilities, health issues or special learning needs
- Student progress, strengths and areas that need to be improved
- Anything causing the student to be anxious, unhappy or uncomfortable
- Circumstances at home, e.g. a death in the family, divorce or change in living situation
- Things that are happening at school, e.g. learning updates, conflict with peers, achievements

ACTIVITY: Read the examples of both types of communication channels. Discuss who might be excluded and not receive information from each channel.

Whenever you are planning to communicate to parents, think of multiple channels of communication you can use to ensure that every parent got the opportunity to receive the message.

ORAL COMMUNICATION:

SGA Meetings:  parents who work during the week day

Village Meetings: _____


Parent-Teacher Days at Schools: _____

Home visits by teachers or head teachers: _____

Phone calls between the parents and the school: _____

Pass the message through Radio: _____

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION:

Official correspondences from administration:  illiterate parents

Communication notebook between parents and teacher: _____

Report Cards: _____

Text or WhatsApp Messages: _____

The message passed through newsletters: _____

Uwafashe ifoto: Nishimwe Natasha



PLANNING AND CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Meetings are the ideal opportunity for parents, parent leaders and school staff to communicate. In order for this communication to be effective, the meetings must be planned and well-facilitated.

Discuss the following questions:

- How do you plan or prepare for effective meetings? What needs to be done in advance?
- How do you communicate meeting times to parents? Is this effective?
- How do you conduct SGA meetings? What are the different agenda items of the meeting?
- How do you encourage active participation of all parents? Are women or men equally vocal?
- What strategies are used to ensure communication is two-way?

After your discussions, refer to Appendix C at the end of the module to learn more how to plan and conduct an SGA meeting.



Photo credit: Natasha Nishimwe

CASE STORY: Have a volunteer read the case story aloud.

As the Head Teacher, I received several complaints from parents about teachers. Similarly, at staff meetings, teachers complained that parents weren't supporting their children. I discussed the issue with the other SGAC members, and we decided to organize a Parent-Teacher Day at school. We chose a day during school holidays when teachers didn't have lessons. We invited families to come to school to discuss their children's progress.

During the Parent-Teacher Day, some meetings were very productive. Teachers gave updates on the child's strengths and weaknesses, as well as other general observations. They also shared with parents ideas for how they could support their children's learning at home. However, I also noticed a meeting where the teacher was overly critical of the child's learning abilities. He asked the parent why she never replied to the information provided by the teacher. The parent responded that she was frustrated about the negative message she always received and felt the teacher was not doing his job.

Based on the observations from parent-teacher day, I realized that teachers need guidance on how to give productive feedback to parents. I organized a debrief session with the teaching staff. I explained the importance of how we communicate with parents. I suggested always starting communication with a positive aspect, for example, something the child does well or a commendable personality trait. I explained that after the positive comment, teachers can introduce challenges or areas for improvement, choosing their words carefully to not make parents defensive. They should also encourage parents to respond or share their ideas on the issue. Finally, teachers should finish with another encouraging comment or appreciation in order to end on a positive note.





Teachers began applying this approach. Communication between parents and schools increased. Teachers began communicating more positive feedback to parents. As a result, I noticed parents coming to school to talk to teachers, not only when there was a problem but also for regular interaction and communication.

What was the challenge this head teacher faced and the strategy she used to address it? How did she refine her approach to be more impactful?




ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Think of ways parents and school staff can improve home-school communication. Write one strategy your school can use in each box.

What Parents and Parent Leaders Can Do	What School Leaders and Staff Can Do
ESTABLISHING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS	
Share with school administration preferred way of communication.	Compile contact information for all parents or caregivers.
	
MAKING TIME TO COMMUNICATE	
	
IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION	
	
ENSURING THAT COMMUNICATION IS INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE	
	

Based on these examples, identify 3 priority actions to take forward this month.

 _____

Monthly Assignment: Collaborate to organize a SGAC meeting plan for an upcoming SGA meeting.

Among the items on the agenda, one will be identifying strategies for improving home-school communication. Use this template to prepare the meeting and then share it with SEO for his/her follow up.

Date and time for SGA meeting: _____

Create agenda:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Strategies for increasing parent attendance and participation in SGA meeting:



Proposed communication channels /strategies for improving home-school communication (to be discussed with parents in SGA meeting):



APPENDIX C:

PLANNING AND CONDUCTING MEETINGS

There are different ways to plan and conduct a meeting depending on the objective of the meeting. Below are some directives that can be taken into consideration:

- Prepare the aim and objective of the meeting in advance
- Think about who should attend the meeting and prepare invitations. Use various communication channels to ensure that are accessible to all parents, including those with disabilities
- Send invitations on time (14 days in advance for normal meetings, and 5 days in advance for urgent meetings)
- Prepare the venue for the meeting, ensure adequate seating for all
- Agree on how the meeting will be conducted to engage parents to participate actively

PARTS OF THE MEETING

1. Opening the meeting

- » Welcome speech by the president of SGAC who is the Chair of the Meeting
- » Presentation of the chair of the meeting, the minute-taker and any visitors
- » Monitor attendance. Ensure there is a sufficient number of attendees required to hold the meeting
- » Explain the objective of the meeting
- » Run through the agenda of meeting and check if there is any additional points to be added
- » Set ground rules, such as respecting ideas of others, staying on topic, go avoid receiving calls inside the room, not interrupting others, etc.

2. Read the minutes of the previous meeting

- » Read the summary of the previous meeting
- » Check if the decisions taken were put into practice
- » Discuss challenges or future action points
- » Approve minutes

3. During the meeting

- » Address each agenda item
- » Minute taker records a summary of ideas
- » Action points, responsible people and time frames are decided for each item

4. Closing the meeting

- » Share with attendees a summary of decisions and action points
- » Determine date of next meeting
- » Thank participants
- » Remind participants to sign attendance list

5. Things to be considered while chairing a meeting

- » Good management of time
- » Ensure communication remains positive and productive
- » Encourage active participation of all participants, including men and women
- » Ensure that not only the same people are giving ideas
- » Discourage submeetings of parents discussing issues simultaneously
- » Reach consensus after having discussed on an issue
- » Support attendees who have difficulty in expressing themselves orally so they can also be heard
- » Manage different behaviors of participants in the meeting

SEO GUIDE

MODULE 3:

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

SEOs can support systems to ensure that parents and schools are communicating effectively about children’s learning and well-being. SEOs should ensure that:

- The communication among the schools and parents is two-way
- Schools have a common understanding of the information all parents should have access to
- Schools are supported with suggested communication channels to parents
- Parents are made aware of platforms for communicating to school staff.

SELF-EVALUATION:

Think about common practices in your sector. Indicate the extent to which the following statements are valid.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOME SCHOOLS	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
I have established a regular communication system with head teachers.					
There is two way communication between schools and parents in my sector.					
I provide advice to schools on strategies for establishing inclusive communication channels.					
Schools in my sector conduct SGA and SGAC meetings on a regular basis.					

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	SOME SCHOOLS	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
I encourage schools to promote women's leadership in parent forums.					
I attend SGA meetings in schools.					
I get regular reports from schools on SGA and SGAC meetings and provide feedback when necessary.					

REFLECTING ON THE CONTENT OF MODULE THREE: In your sector, what are the main challenges school-communities face in relation to communication between schools and parents?



Photo credit: Colin Crowley



CASE STORY: Read the case study and underline some of the key ways this SEO supported the SGACs and her schools.

As SEO, I received many complaints from parents saying that school leaders chased away their children from school because they haven't fulfilled all of the requirements requested by the schools. At the same time, the Head Teachers complained that parents are not providing their children with all the required materials that children need for school.

I decided to attend an SGA meeting at a nearby school to learn more about the issue. In the meeting, parents said that they only learn about the school requirements once their children have been sent away from the school. The schools claimed that the required materials were discussed and agreed in the SGA meeting but parents didn't implement the decisions taken. School staff sent children back home to remind the parents to provide with them the agreed school materials. Some parents responded that they were not present in that meeting.

After having those discussions at the sector level meeting with head teachers, I organized a session on effective communication between parents and schools. We established a system to ensure that the information from SGA meetings reach all parents, including those who were not able to attend the meeting. We agreed that Head Teachers and other SGAC members will share the reminder information with the village leader about the action points from SGA meeting. The village leader can communicate to the parents their parts in implementation of those action points. We also agreed that the school will be hanging notice boards in school that includes the summary of the action points for SGA meeting. At the start of the new academic year, schools held Parent-Teacher Days where all of the necessary information was communicated to children's families and challenges were discussed openly.

With improved communication, there was less conflict between parents and school staff. I encountered far fewer complaints and also noticed in an increase in parental engagement.

What can you do when you receive a complaint from a parent or a head teacher related to a communication issue?








THE ROLE OF THE SEO

Read the five ideas about how SEOs can support effective communication between schools and parents. Then identify two more strategies that you could apply.

1. Support Head Teachers to ensure that they establish two way communication channels. Ensure they report on the strategies they are employing.
2. Follow up with Head Teachers to ensure regular SGA and SGAC meetings are held regularly, as mandated by REB.
3. Attend SGA meetings and provide feedback on how to improve the effectiveness of the meetings.
4. Get the reports from Schools about their SGAC and SGA meetings and provide feedback.
5. Encourage schools to establish a Parent-Teacher days.

6.  _____
7.  _____
8.  _____

SEO Assignment

TICK EACH ACTIVITY AS IT IS COMPLETED

- Follow up to ensure that Head Teachers and SGACs completed Module 3: Communicating Effectively.
- Monitor schools on progress towards compiling contact information for all parents.
- During school visits, gather information on commonly used communication strategies. Provide advice where necessary.
- Attend at least one SGA meeting at each school.
- Get a report from each school on proposed communication channels/strategies for improving home-school communication.

NOTES





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