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School governing body for parents' productive involvement in South Africa

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Abstract

Purpose – The democratic constitution that came into effect in 1994 and ushered in the new South Africa recognises parents' role in education hence the established of an innovative school governance structure of which parents are in the majority. Before then, there existed parents–teachers association in schools. Its members were handpicked and therefore undemocratic and ineffective. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how the innovation in school governance encourages parents in the rural areas to be productively involved in school matters.

Design/methodology/approach – The study used the qualitative research method of focus group interviews to explore the extent to which the school governing body fosters active involvement of parents in school matters. The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting 21 school governors from three rural schools who were deemed information-rich to participate in the study.

Findings – The study found that the post-apartheid school governing body concept, which is an innovation in education management and leadership, encourages and promotes productive parents' involvement in education of their children.

Originality/value – The findings have lessons and implications for school management and leadership in the developing countries because as an Africa adage says, "it takes a whole village to bring up a child".

Keywords School governance, Parental involvement, Productive, Education, Democracy, Participation

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Education is the best tool for the realisation of positive change in the contemporary world because properly managed and quality education can lead to the achievement of socio-economic and political emancipation and advancement for humans, communities and nations. As Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) rightly intimates "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". Indeed, it is through education that relevant knowledge, skills and community values are transmitted from one generation to another to ensure socio-economic stability and continuity of nations. Matos (2000) attests that it has now been widely accepted that an educated population is the primary resource that every nation must strive to build. Unlike the situation in the past, when natural resources counted most, today, only an educated population can contribute meaningfully to development and participate significantly in national and international distribution of labour and wealth. This paper argues that education has become everyone's business in today's world and therefore, what touches all should be deliberated by all. This view confirms the African wise saying that it takes a whole village to bring up a child. Thus, if education is the vehicle for development and affects every citizen, then it cannot be left in the hands of teachers alone. Parents and caregivers live with children and have reasons for enrolling their kids at a school, i.e. providing them formal education. As people who enrol children in schools and pay for education, they may know what they want for their children and should, therefore, be active partners in the provision of education. The recognition of the fact that parents and communities have a role to play in the education of their children and in line with constitutional mandate (SASA, 1996) gave birth to the school governing body (SGB) concept

in the post-apartheid South Africa. It is imperative that education, an institution which is everyone's business, should involve all citizens and stakeholders, particularly parents, to get the best education possible for children. The recognition of community or parents' role in education in a democratic country led to the enactment of the South African Schools' Act (1996). The Act (SASA, 1996) saw the establishment of a democratically elected school governing body for each public school, on which parents are in the majority. In contrast to what prevailed under the previous political dispensation where undemocratic school committees governed black community schools, the SGB is a novel democratic initiative by the government to ensure parents' active involvement in the education of their children. Mabasa and Temane (2012) affirm that whereas school governance used to be characterised by authoritarian and exclusive practices, the new policy requires broad and democratic participation by parents, teachers and learners in the life of the school through the medium of SGBs.

The context of the study and the rationale for decentralised school governance in South Africa

Before 1994, education (and for that matter, the school) in South Africa was administered, managed or governed along racial lines. There were separate departments for white, Indian, coloured and black schools (Quan-Baffour, 2006). Of the four separate departments, the least funded and the worst managed was the one for blacks. Under the minority rule in South Africa, black parents, and for that matter, communities were not productively involved in the education of their own children. The parents and teachers associations, which "*governed*" schools at that time were not only undemocratic, but also ineffective. Members of the parent/teacher associations (PTA) were handpicked by the school principal in consultation with the local chief (Quan-Baffour and Arko Achemfuor, 2014). While all over the globe education is regarded as an instrument to forge national cohesion and unity in the contemporary multi-cultural societies, the reverse was the case under the minority white government of South Africa. Soudien and Baxen (1998) affirm that during apartheid, education was used not only to achieve social separation, but it was also the legitimating arena for white supremacy and for the complex ordering that evolved around it. Within that order, the hidden and explicit curricula were configured to produce, reproduce and validate racial separation and hierarchy. This practice became untenable under majority rule in a country with democratic constitution and institutions. The preamble of SASA (1996) states, *inter alia,* "The achievement of democracy in South Africa has consigned to history the past system of education which was based on racial inequality and segregation". The introduction of SGBs is to democratise the school culture that had been under autocratic and undemocratic socio-political system that traversed all sectors of the society (Karlsson, 2002). The Act (SASA, 1996) justifies the establishment of SGBs for the decentralisation of democratic school governance in the following words:

> This country requires a new national system for all schools which will redress past injustices in education provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all people's talent and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism ... protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators and promote their acceptance of responsibility for the organization, governance, and the funding of schools in partnership with the state.

It is the responsibility of the government to provide quality education (i.e. teaching and learning) for all citizens of the country, but this responsibility can only be executed fully well when the government works in tandem with all the important stakeholders, particularly communities, parents and teachers. Under the South African Schools' Act (SASA), schools

were given to communities to govern, something novel in making decentralisation of education a reality in South African education provision. Citing Narayan and Katrinka (2002) and Takyi *et al.* (2013) intimate that for local people to confidently and competently express their own knowledge, conduct their own analysis and declare their own priorities, outsiders should step off their pedestals, sit down, "hand over the stick" and listen and learn. The local people, particularly parents, live with their children, enrol them in schools and pay fees and other funds. For this reason, they should be at the centre stage of school governance because as the saying goes, "the one who pays for the piper calls for the tune". By actively and productively participating in decisions that relate to school matters, they can be assured that their interests in their children's education are advanced and protected. Lack of opportunity for participation has some dangers, and as Nyerere (1968) cited by Takyi *et al.* (2013) aptly intimate:

> if people are not involved in public ownership, and cannot control the policies followed, the public ownership can lead to facism. Socialism is only possible if the people as a whole are involved in the government of their political and economic affairs.

The productive participation of parents or local community members in education is, therefore, of paramount importance to the achievement of quality education. The views of various stakeholders in education can promote quality. This view is underscored by the following two African wise sayings: *"two heads are better than one"* and *"Knowledge is like a baobab tree; no single person's hands can embrace it all"*. In every community, knowledge is dispersed, and to get the best for children's education, attempts should be made to get as many stakeholders on board as possible to ensure that decisions are taken by diverse and broader community members who have vested interest in education. Although capacity-building might be costly SGB, members should be trained to ensure their productive participation in school governance for the realisation of long-term goals of education. Without education and training for SGB members, it is not likely rural black schools can be at par with the previous "white-only" schools.

Objective(s) of the study
The objectives of this study were to explore:

(1) the role of the SGB as an innovative governance strategy in rural South Africa; and

(2) the SGB's contribution to parents' active and productive involvement in the education of their children.

Theoretical framework
The study is grounded in the transformative leadership theory, which was propounded by Paulo Freire (1993), the renowned Brazilian Adult Educator. In Freirian parlance, the theory is praxis because it is action oriented, i.e. it puts theory into practice. The transformative leadership, as the name indicates, is a new form of leadership in education where management and governance are based on democratic principle of collective decision-making. The theory is a democratic revolution in educational leadership, management and governance that limits the constraints imposed by institutionalised centralised authority and gives way to ideas and initiatives from the ordinary citizen and stakeholder at the grassroots level of education provision. It is for the foregoing virtue of the theory that motivated this author to use it as the theoretical foundation of the study. Freire's own experiences of authoritarianism and a job as a secretary of education (Weiner, 2003) in Brazil informed his formulation of the theory of transformative leadership. The theory advocates for democracy and recognises the inputs of all important stakeholders in education as a pre-requisite to

transform schools. A stakeholder here, as described by Lewis (2006), is any group or an individual who can affect or be affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives.

Freire (1993) cited by Weiner (2003), based on his democratic ideals, formalised the notion of formative power by closing the gap between leaders and the led. The transformative leadership theory, therefore, argues for autonomy as a condition that arises from ethical and responsible engagement with decision-making, a form of "democracy from below" (Aronowitz, 1998). The theory calls for the popular public schooling system where the contexts of the people are focused by engaging and involving them in collective processes to take a critical look and action to improve their conditions (Weiner, 2003). Participation here refers to the involvement of a significant number of persons in situations or actions, which can enhance their well-being (Takyi et al., 2013). The participation or engagement in this context is to promote the involvement of the disadvantaged people who hitherto were excluded from decision-making to take part in planning and implementation of policies that affect the education of their own children. The transformation of schooling, as espoused by Freire's theory, is holistic because it transcends physical infrastructure, authority, management and governance of the entire system of education at the local level. It brings all important stakeholders on board to ensure quality. Freire (1993) intimates that to normalise relationship among education role players for the achievement of quality education all branches of the education workforce, i.e. principals, parents, students, educators, supervisors, community members and government, should be involved in the dissemination of school policy. This should begin a process where they work together as a collective force. People will normally tend to act on issues they have strong feelings about because there is a direct link between emotions and motivation to act (Freire, 1993), which is why, any education and development projects need to start with the identification of issues that local people talk about with excitement, fear, hope, anxiety or anger (Fritze, 2005). The theory of transformative leadership, as observed by Takyi et al. (2013), is a practical way of getting groups actively involved, breaking through apathy and developing critical awareness about the causes of problems.

This theory has implications for the school situation in South Africa. The South African Schools' Act (1996) gave the community members the opportunity to serve on SGBs to enable them to participate in decision-making as a pre-requisite for school improvement. SGBs as community or parents' representatives must promote the best interest of the learners and schools. As stipulated in Section 20 (1) (a) of SASA (1996), the SGB of a public school must promote the best interest of the children and the school. The introduction of SGBs is an attempt to democratise and ensure the broader participation by all the relevant stakeholders. Among others, SGBs have the mandate to develop a mission statement, adopt a code of conduct for learners, support staff to perform their professional duties, determine school times, draw school budget, recommend teachers for appointment, administer and control school properties (Karlsson, 2002).

Despite the policy to decentralise school governance, there are still dysfunctional schools in some parts of the country. Some of the schools have not yet been transformed or improved, perhaps due to apathy, lack of governance skills by the SGB members or opportunity for knowledgeable community members to serve on the governance structures. Heystek (2003) observes that parents of former Model C schools have powerful governing bodies to manage their schools because of the vast levels of skills and experiences of most of the parents as against parents of black schools who most often have little education and no experience in management to enable them to participate effectively in school governance. This lack of capacity (i.e. education, skills and experience) may lead to manipulation and abuse by some education stakeholders. Harper and Masondo (2014) report that the South African Teachers' Union (SADTU) sells posts, and in some cases, demand sex for job.

To achieve proper transformation, the local community members, particularly parents, should be empowered to take the responsibility and be productively involved in school

matters. School governance is an act of determining policy and roles by which a school is to be organised and controlled to ensure that rules and policies are carried out in terms of the law (Maile, 2002). It is for this reason the SGB members need to be empowered through education and training to become productive in their work as school governors. Freire (1993) rightly puts it thus, "we educate in order to transform".

Methodology

The study was conducted through qualitative research methods, namely, focus group interviews and participant observation, to explore the extent to which the SGB fosters parents' productive involvement in their children's education. This case study focused on three rural high schools which were purposively selected to explore the SGB activities. Citing Yin (1984), Quan-Baffour and Arko-Achemfuor (2014) attest that a case study is an inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life content when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. From the interpretive perspective, case studies strive towards a comprehensive understanding of how participants relate and interact with each other in a specific situation and how they make meaning of a phenomenon being studied (Creswell et al, 2012). This researcher used the case study approach because it offers a multiple-perspective analysis in which a researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of one or two participants in a situation, but also the views of other relevant groups of actors and interaction between them (Creswell et al., 2012). The use of focus group discussions in this case study was also justified in that the approach enabled the researcher to consider the investigation from the perspective of the interviewees (King, 2004). Secondly, the approach enabled him to engage in an in-depth study of the duties and functions of the SGBs in the selected schools. Through the in-depth focus group discussions, the participants could recount their lived experiences as governors of their respective schools. Bryan and Bell (2011) affirm that most qualitative researchers express their commitment to viewing events and the social world through the eyes of the subjects they are studying. The social world, to the qualitative researchers, should be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied, rather than as though those subjects were incapable of reflecting on their social world (Bryan and Bell, 2011).

Selection of participants for the study

Earlier studies of the rural schools in the North West and Northern Cape Provinces made the researcher aware that some challenges might militate against the productive participation in the SGB activities by parents (Quan-Baffour, 2006 and Quan-Baffour and Arko-Achemfuor, 2014). The researcher purposively selected three rural high schools, two from the North West Province and one from the Northern Cape to investigate what the SGBs are doing to support the local community schools. The three rural schools were purposively selected for an in-depth study because they were dysfunctional prior to the establishment of the SGBs. Each of the selected schools has learner population of over 800, with less than 17 educators. The seven SGB members (comprising the chairperson, deputy chairperson, secretary, treasurer, educator representative, principal and a learner representative) were purposively recruited from each of the three schools for the case study because they were deemed information-rich. The total number of the participants was 21. The researcher deliberately selected the three dysfunctional rural schools for this exploratory case study to find out how the SGB concept has transformed them. Citing Schumacher and McMilan (1989) and Quan-Baffour and Arko-Achemfuor (2014) affirms that a case study does not necessarily mean that one site only is studied.

Data collection
Data were collected through focus group interviews, and participant observation with SGB members of the selected schools. The interview focused on the mandate or duties of the SGBs, things militating against members' productive participation in governance activities and suggestions to overcome the hindrances to make members more productive. With the permission from the participants, the researcher transcribed all responses and wrote down reflective notes throughout the interviews. To ensure that all the responses were recorded, the researcher often requested participants to repeat their inaudible responses. He read and asked if what had been captured was what the participants exactly wanted to say. The focus group interview sessions took place in the staff common room of each school and lasted for 90 min.

As a participant observer, the researcher visited the research sites a number of times to observe how the SGB members supported the school management teams in enforcing discipline and creating good climate for the schools. He observed dress code, punctuality of both learners and educators and extra-curricular activities to obtain first-hand information on the conduciveness of the school atmosphere for culture of learning and teaching (COLT). On a visit to one of the sites, the researcher was impressed to see an SGB member (a lady) who moved from class to class to check late coming and absenteeism among learners and educators.

Results and discussion
Apart from the biographical information, which served as a precursor to the analysis of the data, the results of the investigation were analysed under three main themes considered as hindrances to the productive involvement of parents in school governance matters. Apart from some verbatim quotes from the participants, the researcher made cross references to the relevant sources in the literature to validate the empirical findings throughout the discussion. The use of both reference to the literature and some of the exact words from the participants made the findings more valid and reliable.

Biographical information of participants
Although biographical information was not directly focused on by the study, it was deemed an important precursor to the data analysis. The biographic data revealed the following about the SGB members in the three schools:

The ages of the SGB members ranged between 17 and 70 years. It also indicated that two of the ex-officio members (i.e. two principals) had BA Degrees, four educator participants were in possession of the University Diploma in Education (i.e.one principal and three teachers) and three were in Grade 11 (i.e. learner representatives). Of the 12 parents, five had standard 10 certificates (i.e. Grade 12) and seven were below Grade 8. Of the 21 SGB members who participated in the study, only seven were females, of which three were the treasurers for their respective schools.

The above biographical information has important implications for productive school governance. For example, the low level of the educational background of those below Grade 8 as well as those with the equivalent of Grade 12 could be a major hindrance to productive participation in governance matters. Almost half of the SGB members in the three schools under study (seven parents and three learners) on account of low education background are not likely to comprehend official documents and correspondences regarding school governance. The governance documents from the department of education are written in standard English, and the lack of adequate comprehension might hinder productive contribution of members, as they could not participate in debate and thus add value to important issues at stake. One can infer from the above information that education, no matter

how basic it might be, is indispensable to nation-building. Matos (2000) succinctly affirms that an educated population is the primary resource that every nation must strive to build. Indeed, the low level of education among a substantial number of the school governors might be a recipe for manipulation by the "*powerful*" members of the SGB for their own selfish ends. The less-educated SGB members might be used as mere rubber stamps by some powerful labour union members in cahoots with some school managers to engage in corrupt practices for the appointment of less-qualified and experienced teachers. The recent articles in City Press on how SADTU sells posts (Harper and Masondo, 2014) and SADTU Man demands sex for job (Masondo, 2014), as discussed in the literature, are cases in point.

Theme 1: mandate or the role of the SGB. Regarding their role as school governors, the discussions at the various sites revealed that the participants knew their role as community representatives elected to assist the school management team (SMT) to run the schools. The literature review attests that the SASA's (1996) mandated community members, particularly representatives of parents, to play an active role in their children's education. This knowledge of parents' role in the education of their children was also affirmed by one SGB chairperson in the following words:

> 'we are elected by the community to ensure that our school runs smoothly for quality teaching and learning to occur'.

The above response from the SGB chairperson was unanimously affirmed by the other participants, who acknowledged that in achieving the above goal, they should formulate school policies for admission of learners, to regulate school times, code of conduct for learners, school uniforms and discipline, recommend appointment of teachers, draw school budget, manage school funds, engage in fund raising and visit school regularly to monitor teaching and learning. The response also confirms the mandate from SASA (1996), as emphasised in the literature section of this study that the SGBs of public schools are there to promote the best interest of the learners and the school.

> As one participant added, "we are here to protect the interest of learners. We also protect the school funds to ensure that it is put to good use. This is why we require three members to sign before money is taken from the bank".

The information above indicates commitment on the part of the SGB members who work hard to ensure the effective running of their schools. As Karlsson (2002) attests, SGBs were established to support schools to perform their academic and professional duties, administer and control school properties. The information from the biography of the participants, however, indicates that this knowledge and the commitment to their work as school governors might be hampered by the low education background of many SGB members.

Theme 2: experiences of the SGB members. As the representatives of parents elected to serve on the SGB, the participants might have some experiences regarding the work they do in the schools. The researcher, therefore, requested them to share their experiences with him. The participants corroborated in their responses that they at first felt elated when they were elected, but were nervous to serve on the SGB. At first, they were elated because, as one parent participant put it:

> It was an opportunity for us to serve on the democratic governance structure of our schools. At long last, our inputs in education have been recognised by the government.

The response above is pertinent to transformation in educational leadership and management because prior to the South African Schools Act of 1996, most parents in the rural communities did not have the opportunity to be productively involved in school matters. The new democratic dispensation, however, recognises the inputs of all major stakeholders, particularly parents, in education.

Regarding why the SGB members said they were nervous, the respondents agreed in their responses that it was difficult at first to address teachers, principals and education officials who were mostly males and more educated and professionals in education. In putting it more candidly, one female member had this to say:

> In our rural African communities, we respect teachers and principals because they are more educated; more so it is uncommon for females to lead men in discussions. It was therefore difficult for us, mostly women, with less education to sit together with teachers to discuss school matters. As time went on we gained more confidence to work with the teachers.

The above response is normal in the rural African context when people, particularly women, take up positions of responsibility for the first time in any organisation. Education leadership is undergoing tremendous transformation in the South Africa, and that requires the inputs of all stakeholders for collective decision-making.

Theme 3: specific support to improve learner performance. The recognition of parents' role in education in a democratic country led to the establishment of the South African Schools' Act of 1996. The Act recognises parents' role in making schools, especially those in the rural communities, more functional. To this end, the researcher asked the parent members of the SGB the specific role they play in improving learner performance in the schools they govern. The responses from the parents revealed that they:

(1) check punctuality, absenteeism and indiscipline among learners;

(2) ensure learners do their homework; and

(3) ensure a conducive teaching and learning climate in the schools.

In summing up the specific things they do to improve learner performance, one parent (female) had this to say, (reproduced verbatim):

> We visit the school on daily basis to check lateness, indiscipline and absenteeism to ensure that the school climate is conducive to effective teaching and learning. We write down names of learners and educators who bunk classes and call them to explain their actions to us. We warn them to refrain from such acts.

The specific role parents play in improving learner performance in the schools is laudable. In an era when corporal punishment has been abolished from all South African schools, educators might find it difficult to deal with learner indiscipline. The schools, therefore, need support from parents to ensure that the core business of the school – teaching and learning – is not interrupted by learner indiscipline. Effective teaching and learning can only take place under a good school climate. The parents' specific role in ensuring the culture of learning and teaching (COLTS) is, therefore, a step in the right direction and in line with SASA (1996).

Theme 4: hindrance to productive participation in SGB matters. The SBG is a novel innovation in the South Africa's education history, and as such, its members face some challenges. This might be the result of apartheid policy of social separation. As Soudien and Baxen (1998) aptly point out, during apartheid, education was used for social separation. The separation, to a large extent, disadvantaged millions of blacks, some of whom are now school governors. The major challenges that work against productive involvement of the SGB members as mentioned by all the 21 participants in the study and observed by the researcher at the three different sites are the following:

(1) lack of knowledge, skills and experience in school matters;

(2) low level of education among large number of SGB members in the rural communities; and

(3) the SGB is a voluntary service that hinders members' own social and economic activities.

A response by one participant (female), reproduced verbatim, echoes the sentiments of the group members:

> Reading and comprehension levels in English of almost half of our members is very low. We are supposed to read, interpret and adapt national education polices to our school contexts but most of our members can hardly understand circulars to enable them effectively contribute to discussions on important school matters.

Another participant, a male principal of one of the schools, added (verbatim):

> Budget drawing is one of the major responsibilities of the SGB. Lack of basic mathematics and accounting skills hinder the productive participation of many of the SGB members in this crucial matter. In fact, only a handful of my SGB members are productive due to lack of basic knowledge and skills.

Heystek (2003) affirms the above responses by stating that the parents of the former white only schools have effective and powerful SGBs unlike their counterparts in the black schools who have little education and no experience in school management. As an unprecedented innovative structure in school governance, the effective functioning of the SGB would depend very much on knowledge, skills, experience and commitment of its members. The background of many members of the SGBs in the rural black communities (i.e. low education levels and lack of experience in school matters) could hinder their productive participation in the school governance matters. Although many members might be passionate and committed to ensure quality education for their children, that alone is not enough to enable them achieve the SGB mandate.

The lack of knowledge, skills and experience in school matters could also be a source of conflict between the SGB and SMT. Some SGB members might overstep their mark or cross the line by literally attempting to take over the functions of the school principal who has the professional responsibility to manage the school.

The interview and the observation also revealed that because of little education and experience, most SGB members in the rural communities are unable to draw the line between governance and management roles. In many instances, some of the SGB members do not know that they are there to support the SMT. This misunderstanding could often lead to conflicts between the SGB and SMT. The inability of many school governors to understand that supporting the school is different from managing it stems from the policy of separate amenities where blacks received inferior education as compared to their white counterparts. Lack of better education might make it difficult for some SGB members to differentiate between roles. Soudien and Baxen (1998) agree with this researcher that during apartheid education was designed to legitimise white supremacy. As one SGB member affirmed, reproduced verbatim:

> Many of us do not know the difference between governance and management and so we sometimes do what is not expected of us as school governors. Some of our members sometimes go too far because of ignorance of our mandate. We are now beginning to understand that our role is to advice and support the SMT for teaching and learning to run smoothly and also to put the school on good financial footing.

The response above from an SGB member sums it all and accedes to the fact that all has not been well with the understanding of their roles as school governors because of poor education background.

Theme 5: ameliorating the challenges. When they were asked to discuss how to overcome the identified challenges, the participants from the three schools, numbering 21, were

unanimous in their responses that the department of education should provide the SGB members with continuous training to enable them participate fully in school governance matters. The three groups of participants also corroborated in their responses that education and training in basic reading, writing, calculating and budgeting skills could empower them to be more productive in school governance. As one of the participants, a school principal, put it (verbatim):

> Most SGB members are very committed to add value to the smooth running of the school but find it difficult to cope. They are hampered by low level of education, lack of skills and experience. Their first term is always a nightmare but at the end of the term not all are re-elected. It is very frustrating starting from the scratch to train the newly elected after every three years.

The response above indicates the urgent need to educate and train the SGB members to enable them become more active in school matters. Freire (1993) appropriately intimates that "we educate in order to transform". Thus, the best way to transform the schools is to educate and train their governors continuously.

The participants also said that they need recognition for the work they do for the schools. When asked what kind of recognition, they were unanimous that the department of education should offer them some monthly stipend because they spend much time on school matters. The response from one participant summed up the feelings of the others. She had this to say (reproduced verbatim):

> Sometimes I have to stop taking my cattle for grazing or going to the garden to work because of school matters. We should be given some financial allowances to compensate for the sacrifices we make for the school at the expense of our private work

The request is modest and reasonable. The onus is on the department of education to look into the possibility of granting the SGB members some stipend. Such a recognition could go a long way to increase the commitment of the school governors. As the response indicates, the members are torn between their own socio-economic life and the welfare of the school. The divided attention might hinder their productive participation in important matters affecting the school.

Conclusion
This study was undertaken to explore the extent to which the SGB, as a novel and innovative structure in the South African education landscape, fosters productive involvement of parents in the education of children. A major finding of the study is that the SGB is an important legislative innovation in education that has not only made school governance democratic, but more importantly, ensures productive parents' involvement in the education of their children. The study also revealed that although the SGB in the rural communities promotes the involvement of parents, lack of basic knowledge, skills and experience among many members remains a critical hindrance to their *productive* involvement in crucial school matters. The study concludes that to foster active involvement of parents in their children's education at the community level, the SGB members should be empowered through continuous training (non-formal education) and some financial incentives for their sacrifices.

Recommendations
Based on the findings, the study recommended the following:

(1) The qualification or eligibility to serve on the SGB should be revised by the department of education to make Grade 12 the minimum qualification to ensure greater participation in SGB matters.

(2) Members of the SGB should be provided with basic continuous non-formal education to enable them to be more productive in SGB matters.

(3) To be more committed to the work as school governors, the department of education should offer them some stipend or incentives as a recognition for their contribution to community development.

(4) Other African countries should emulate the South African SGB concept to ensure democratic participation of parents in education of their children.

List of abbreviations
SASA   South African Schools' Act
SGB   School Governing Body
SMT   School Management Team

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