

COMMUNITY VOICE FOR **BETTER SCHOOLS**

School-based management committees
improving schools in Nigeria

Summary of a qualitative research study

esspin

Education Sector
Support Programme
in Nigeria



UKaid

from the Department for
International Development



Save the Children

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Save the Children works in more than 120 countries.
We save children's lives. We fight for their rights.
We help them fulfil their potential.

ESSPIN is a partnership between the Nigerian government and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) which is transforming the management and funding of basic education in Nigeria.

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This is a summary of a qualitative research report on stakeholders' views of the impact of support given to school-based management committees (SBMCs) as part of the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) programme, which is funded by the UK Department for International Development.

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Cover photo: Children at an SBMC-supported school in Kaduna state
All photos: Jide Adeniyi-Jones, ESSPIN/UKaid

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FOREWORD

Education in Nigeria faces many challenges. Eight million children are out of school, and millions leave school without basic skills. Failure to get funding to schools leaves families with fees they cannot pay. Girls, children affected by disabilities and children from minority ethnic groups are the hardest hit. Save the Children believes that putting children and communities at the centre of education is vital to change this. Nigeria has good resources and policies, but the links between communication and accountability needed to make schools work are often missing. School-based management committees which involve people in improving their own education have helped with this in many countries.

In 2008, UKaid's Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) was established with Save the Children as part of a consortium led by Cambridge Education. ESSPIN aimed to improve accountability and demand for education through stronger school management committees, along with strengthening government's ability to manage basic education. School-based management committees (SBMCs) in Nigeria had been tested and approved in policy, but few people understood how SBMCs could work on a large scale to get children into school and help them learn.

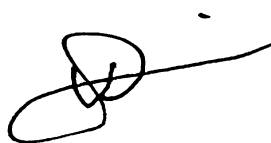
ESSPIN developed a model, based on state SBMC policy guidelines, for helping government and local civil society to set up, train and support SBMCs to play a range of vital roles. This included mobilising resources, including funds, time and labour, to improve schools; approaching government for funding and teachers; getting more children into school; and making sure schools were safer and more welcoming for children. Getting children's and women's concerns listened to was essential.

This was considered ambitious, as large SBMC programmes have tended to focus on school infrastructure. But as this report shows, over 1,100 SBMCs supported by ESSPIN have risen admirably to the challenge. Communities across five states have worked with local government and civil society to become active defenders of children's and families' education rights. Local government has listened and responded to communities' demands for better support. Replication of the model is progressing well.

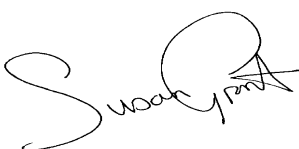
The report summarises findings and conclusions from a participatory study of SBMC progress in ESSPIN-supported communities. Independent researchers interviewed approximately 1,080 parents, SBMC members, children, local education officials and others in five states to find out what changes they had seen after SBMCs were activated.

Data from ESSPIN's extensive monitoring of SBMCs supports many of the research findings published in the full report, *Performance Analysis of School-Based Management Committees Supported by ESSPIN*.^{*} In all states SBMCs were observed to be increasing children's enrolment and attendance, addressing needs for new teachers and buildings, tackling corporal punishment and teaching practice, and supporting vulnerable children back to school. Quantitative data collected by civil society and government partners as part of the SBMC monitoring system over the period of mentoring support to SBMCs (November 2010–November 2011) highlighted the following: out of ten performance standards for SBMCs based on their key roles and responsibilities, SBMCs were achieving eight; and on listening to women and children in SBMC meetings, SBMCs were achieving six out of ten performance standards. Women's participation showed strong improvement and children's participation increased.

Making education fully accessible and accountable in Nigeria will take time. But the evidence suggests that the prospects are bright for SBMCs in Nigeria to help transform education for poor and excluded children.



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^{*}Available at <http://www.esspin.org/index.php/resources/abs/programme/335/ESSPIN-424-Performance-analysis-of-School-Based-Management-Committees-supported-by-ESSPIN>

ABBREVIATIONS

CSO	Civil society organisation
EENET CIC	Enabling Education Network Community Interest Consultants
ESSPIN	Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
LGA	Local Government Authority
LGEA	Local Government Education Authority
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SBMC	School-based management committee
SUBEB	State Universal Basic Education Board
WOKFEI	Womankind Family Enhancement Initiative

INTRODUCTION

This report is a summary of findings from an extensive qualitative research study on stakeholders' views about the impact of school-based management committees (SBMCs) that were activated and trained in 2010, and which continue to be monitored and mentored, as part of the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN).*

The aim was to capture the view of all stakeholders – members of SBMCs, parents, children, teachers, community members, civil society organisations, and government officials at local, state and national level – on the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of the SBMCs they were involved in or had contact with.

ESSPIN is a six-year programme funded by UKaid, which began in 2008. It is one of four state-level programmes (the others covering governance, health and accountability) that aim to strengthen governance and improve the delivery of basic services in Nigeria. With the country's education system having some of the lowest indicators in sub-Saharan Africa, and with 8 million primary-school age children out of school, the challenges the programme needed to address were considerable.

ESSPIN aims to improve the planning, financing and delivery of basic education so as to improve access, equity and quality, and to help the country meet its targets for Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2. It operates at federal, state, community and school level, and is implemented in six states: Enugu, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kwara and Lagos. There were four areas of output:

- Output 1 Federal governance for basic education reform
- Output 2 Governance and management of basic education services strengthened
- Output 3 School improvement
- Output 4 Community engagement and learner participation

Save the Children was asked to lead on Output 4, Strengthening Community Engagement and Learner Participation. Much of this work has involved supporting the activation, training and development of more than 1,100 SBMCs. After a period of initial training in 2010, which introduced the state-specific domesticated guidelines for SBMCs, the committees have received follow-up training and mentoring to enable them to fulfil their role and to continually strengthen their capacity. Support for SBMCs has been delivered by a partnership of 36 civil society organisations and a number of local government staff, managed by state government, and with technical support from ESSPIN.

A mid-term review of the whole programme carried out in July 2011 found evidence that the SBMCs have promoted greater awareness of roles, responsibilities and rights, as well as increased teacher presence, improved teacher–pupil contact time, and more child-centred learning. SBMCs have also lobbied local government education authorities, state universal basic education boards and even construction contractors, with positive results. And some SBMCs were using their investment in school improvements to leverage further support from government. Given the programme's achievements, the Nigerian government through the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) decided to roll out the SBMC model across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory from late 2011 with technical support from ESSPIN. Osun and Ogun states began the process of domestication of the national guidelines in March and April 2012, and Rivers, Taraba, Katsina, Anambra and Akwa-Ibom states followed in May and June 2012.

But ESSPIN wanted to know more about what those closely involved in the programme think of how SBMCs were doing after their first year. How active were they? Were their actions making a difference, and if so, how? Were they contributing to community empowerment and participation, and helping create

* The full report is available at <http://www.esspin.org/index.php/resources/abs/programme/334/ESSPIN-423-Impact-of-support-to-School-Based-Management-Committees> and <http://www.esspin.org/index.php/resources/abs/programme/335/ESSPIN-424-Performance-analysis-of-School-Based-Management-Committees-supported-by-ESSPIN>

a stronger sense of community ownership of schools? Were local communities and government happy with the work of the SBMCs and willing to support them in the longer term? Were views about impact shared by all groups, or did different stakeholders have different views about the impact of their SBMC? Ultimately, was ESSPIN's approach to improving access to quality basic education likely to be sustainable?

ESSPIN wanted to highlight the extent to which its support for SBMCs has been achieved, what worked and why, and what challenges remain, presenting key lessons learned along the way. ESSPIN commissioned EENET CIC (Enabling Education Network Community Interest Consultants) to carry out a piece of qualitative research on the basis of their track record with participatory qualitative research involving education stakeholders.

METHODS

After a rapid desk review of ESSPIN documents, field research was piloted in June 2011. The research questions were then revised (see below), and the second phase of field research was carried out in October 2011. Using participatory methods, including focus-group discussions and semi-structured interviews, around 1,080 participants were involved. The research team visited schools and school clusters covering 53 schools in five of the programme's six states in a range of settings (rural, semi-urban/rural, and urban). Focus groups with pupils used child-friendly methods to enable the children and young people involved to express their views about the work of the SBMCs.

The key research questions, refined during the research, were as follows:

1. What role have SBMCs activated with ESSPIN support played in mobilising and managing/ governing resources for school improvement according to community concerns?
2. What role have SBMCs activated with ESSPIN support played in bringing more children from excluded groups into school?

3. To what extent are SBMCs activated under the ESSPIN model contributing to processes of community empowerment and participation in education?
4. To what extent have women, children and other excluded groups been enabled to have a voice?
5. To what extent have SBMCs activated with ESSPIN support been able to hold duty-bearers to account on improvement of schools and education for children?
6. How has the ESSPIN model of SBMC activation contributed to the capacity of civil society and government to stimulate demand, support and monitor the process of SBMC development?

The researchers developed a matrix for organising the hundreds of pieces of information gathered during field research, categorised into the six areas of questioning. Sub-themes of most commonly occurring issues were then identified. It is under these categories and sub-categories that data is presented in the report. The report also contains 'reflection' boxes highlighting implications of the findings. The concluding section summarises the challenges facing the programme as it is rolled out to all Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) in the six states supported by ESSPIN, and other states across the country.

"ESSPIN has focused on the establishment and functioning of School-based Management Committees (SBMCs) as the main vehicle for strengthening the capacity of communities to support schools and articulate demand for better quality, inclusive education. SBMCs are promoted as a vital link between service users and service providers and as a mechanism for channelling voice, including that of commonly marginalised groups (women, children, girls, nomadic community, etc), and for improving accountability."

ESSPIN, *Community Engagement and Learner Participation*
Output 4, December 2010

KEY FINDINGS

I. MOBILISING AND MANAGING RESOURCES

The research found that members of SBMCs activated under ESSPIN have greater skills and capacity to manage and raise resources to improve schools and the quality of children's education. They are mobilising different sections of the community to support school improvements (including former pupils, local craftspeople, the local education authority, civil society groups, and the private sector). Within their first year, many SBMCs have succeeded in:

- mobilising resources from the local community
- improving school infrastructure and the school environment
- delivering more teaching and learning resources
- beginning to secure resources from government.

RAISING FUNDS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS

At one school, an ex-pupil gave the SBMC N10,000 to fumigate classrooms against termites. And in two primary schools, N30,000–40,000 raised through community mobilisation has paid for teaching materials, classroom renovation and furniture repairs.

SBMC members are undergoing a continuous process of building their skills and confidence so that they know where and how to mobilise financial, material and human resources to help their school deliver its own development plan. To undertake their resource-oversight functions and achieve what they set out to do, they need to receive adequate state support.

“SBMCs are taking direct actions related to the improvement of education for children in their school communities. These actions include both mobilising community resources to support schools,

and starting to approach local and state government education authorities to demand their entitlements to government support.”

(ESSPIN, Community Engagement and Learner Participation in School Improvement April 2010 – March 2011: Early Impact)

The research gathered stakeholders' views on a number of aspects of this output, which are presented below.

UNDERSTANDING FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Respondents believe that SBMCs are increasing their capacity to manage financial matters for the school, and ensuring that funds raised for school improvements are well spent.

REFLECTION

Agencies monitoring SBMC activities need to check that all members have a good understanding of their role and how to put it into practice. If there is confusion, this should be drawn to the attention of the relevant authority, which can then provide further support.

OWNERSHIP OF SCHOOL FUNDS AND CONFIDENCE TO SEEK RESOURCES

SBMCs have gained greater confidence to deal with financial issues, and are being proactive in raising funds and/or mobilising resources from within the community and beyond. Many respondents reported feeling more confident to hold other agencies and government departments to account for providing their school with funds and materials. Local ownership of school finances and decisions needs to get stronger rather than weaker, and care needs to be taken to ensure this happens at local level as the SBMC model is replicated nationally.

REFLECTION

Stakeholder ownership of school funds (and thus of the school) is a vital element in ensuring that the SBMC initiative is sustainable after external support ends. But ownership and sustainability could be undermined unless there is adequate support from government to match SBMC efforts. There also need to be simpler and quicker mechanisms put in place to respond to SBMC demands, particularly when it comes to approving straightforward charges and expenditures.

MOBILISING FINANCIAL AND PRACTICAL SUPPORT WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Fundraising activities tend to focus on three potential sources of support:

- seeking voluntary contributions direct from SBMC members
- encouraging other community members to contribute
- approaching and lobbying key figures in the community to 'do their bit'.

As well as encouraging financial support, SBMCs have successfully mobilised local people to give their time and labour voluntarily.

REFLECTION

Seeking voluntary community and local support (whether financial, material or practical) is both a feasible and sustainable approach to improving schools, and one that goes hand in hand with developing a greater sense of community ownership of the local school and the quality of education it offers. However, volunteerism and support varies according to capacity at community level, and does not negate the key role of government (whether local, state or national) in delivering quality local education services. SBMCs and communities need to feel that their own efforts are being matched by adequate government support, and that they have not just been left to 'go it alone'.

MOBILISING AND CONTROLLING HUMAN RESOURCES FOR THE SCHOOL

SBMCs have funded and secured more teachers and better-qualified teachers, as well as finding and supporting voluntary teachers (sometimes ex-pupils). Some reported successfully lobbying the government to provide more teachers by directly approaching officials or writing letters. Some committees even challenged the practice of transferring teachers out of their schools without their consent, demonstrating the confidence they have gained. However, many schools still have far too few teachers, and lack suitably qualified teachers, as well as teachers with dedicated language or other skills.

One school has mobilised two former pupils as volunteer teachers, funded by the SBMC. And in another, the SBMC pays a kindergarten teacher's salary.

Some SBMCs are also beginning to play a role in choosing and managing teachers and other school staff, as well as helping to deal with any problems that arise. Traditionally, the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) was responsible for managing school personnel, but this is something that needs to change to support locally responsive education.

REFLECTION

SBMCs adopting a role in recruiting and managing teachers so early in their development is a strong sign of their empowerment and is likely to strengthen community ownership further. Ensuring that this is able to continue, and that the SBMCs'/schools' efforts are fully endorsed and supported by the government, will be key for sustainability after ESSPIN. Also, despite this generally being a sign of progress, some SBMCs may need ongoing support to ensure that they are taking appropriate and effective action to support teachers.

THE GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

In Jigawa, the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) provided cleaning equipment to a primary school, including shovels, brooms, and dustbins, so there is a much cleaner environment now. But in other states, the SBMCs have written to the SUBEB and had no response.

In another state, following advocacy by the SBMC with the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) and in line with the school development plan, rotted wooden window frames were replaced with metal ones and computers were provided.

SBMC members at one school explained that they can resource small things but need the government to contribute too. Unfortunately, there has been a slow response from the government, after they promised funding last September.

Many respondents highlighted existing gaps in government support and the need for the government to give more support. Some cited a lack of response to SBMC requests for assistance, as well as lengthy and frustrating delays (for example, in getting approval for construction work). However, many stakeholders acknowledged that there is little funding available

at LGEA level for school improvements, and that even LGEA officials sometimes did not receive their salaries. Project documents also note that education secretaries often have inadequate funding and have too many requests to deal with (ESSPIN, *Community Engagement April 2010 – March 2011: Early Evidence of Impact*, 2011).

REFLECTION

Recognising the issues of state education funding challenges, the government must support the momentum achieved by SBMCs/schools by responding effectively to requests to provide 'matching' funding, supporting more direct funding to schools, and making more efficient use of its limited budgets/resources.

It is important to investigate the reasons why responses are not being received and, if necessary, further develop the SBMC training package to help members write effective letters, detailing clear plans and budgets, thus increasing their chances of securing funds. Setting up local SBMC forums (bringing together LGEA officials, SBMC representatives from across the state, and other key stakeholders), as already planned in some states, may prove to be a more effective mechanism for raising and discussing these kinds of issues.



An SBMC member repairs furniture at a school in Jigawa state.

IMPROVEMENTS MADE AND RESOURCE GAPS REMAINING

There is strong evidence that SBMCs are making good progress in securing the resources needed for school improvements from within the local community. But there were also many reports of huge resource gaps.

The SBMC at one LGEA school in Kwara has funded extra teachers, but the school still has only five teachers when it needs 12.

Interestingly, the top three improvements reported (building new classrooms or renovating old ones; repairing, making or buying furniture; and buying teaching and learning materials) are also the top three things most frequently cited as still needing to be improved.

This highlights that the scale of what is needed to improve school environments and the quality of education is considerable, and will inevitably take time. Efforts must be located within a 'continuum of improvement'; there is good progress, but there will always be much more to do to deliver increased access, quality and equity of education.

REFLECTION: A CONTINUUM OF CHANGE AND IMPROVEMENT

Sometimes dealing with one problem throws up another. SBMC activities led to increased enrolment and attendance, meaning that classes became more overcrowded, hence an even greater need for new and improved classrooms. Some SBMCs found this demoralising. Government and other stakeholders should reassure and support SBMC members so that the risk of 'knock-on' challenges does not deter other important improvements.

Many schools have prioritised the need for better teaching and learning materials, which presents opportunities for SBMCs to tackle the traditional teacher-centred learning methods and instead promote child-centred materials and approaches to the learning process. In addition, some SBMCs and teachers are innovating and developing their own low-cost materials. These should be shared and documented, as they could provide valuable examples to other schools to develop their own materials.



Women raise concerns about school improvements at an SBMC-supported school in Kaduna state.

2. PROMOTING INCLUSION

Activities carried out by the SBMCs have been successful in terms of:

- improving enrolment and attendance rates
- increasing working children's attendance
- increasing girls' attendance.

SBMCs are expected to play a key role in increasing enrolment and retention rates, and they are clearly fulfilling this role even in the first year. They have focused on identifying children who are out of school, finding out why, and supporting those children and their families to enrol them or get them back into school.

During the research, many community respondents raised issues linked to exclusion such as the role of parents, the impact of teaching and language constraints, and the use of child-centred learning (including child-to-child approaches).

We now look at each specific area under this output.

GENERAL ENROLMENT AND ATTENDANCE ISSUES

Stakeholders from all five states noted an increase in enrolment and/or attendance since the SBMCs were activated. Some had collected data to support this. SBMC members are being proactive in identifying children who do not attend school regularly or who are not enrolled. They are doing this through:

- home and community visits to find absent children or advocate for their education
- intervening directly by escorting children to school or providing financial/material support to poor children
- collecting more systematic data about out-of-school children.

The chairperson of one Local Government Education Authority school in Kaduna state noted that: *“Based on our understanding of our role, we succeeded in bringing 22 out-of-school children back and provided school uniforms for them.”* (ESSPIN, *Position Paper: Community Engagement – March 2011*)

A member of one SBMC in Kaduna north said: *“Through the village head (SBMC chair) we are collecting data [on out-of-school children], ward by ward, and identifying barriers to their attendance and how to address them...”*

REFLECTION

Relatively few respondents commented on the situation of specific groups of excluded children who, in their context, might be considered more marginalised in terms of access to education and more generally. It should be noted that discussing the situation of marginalised groups can be a very sensitive issue; as such, this may require longer, more gradual investigation, which the present research was not designed to do.

That said, it could also be that stakeholders (whether SBMC members, teachers or local government officials) are not yet fully aware of the situation of children from different backgrounds in their local area. Civil society groups and government must ensure that efforts to promote inclusion in schools consider the presence, participation and achievement of all children (girls or boys, children affected or not affected by disabilities, children from minority and majority ethnic and linguistic groups, etc). All SBMCs should ask the question: what more can we do to ensure that the committee, the school and the community prioritise access to education for all children in the community?

MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS

The exclusion or under-representation of minority ethnic children such as nomadic Fulani children is a very pertinent issue in some states, and this was acknowledged by a range of stakeholders, although minority ethnic groups were only mentioned in two of the five states. Despite a good general awareness of the challenges facing minority ethnic children in regularly attending school, those respondents who mentioned the issue had mixed views as to whether SBMCs were making a difference in terms of getting more children from minority ethnic groups attending or enrolled in school.

Some respondents cited specific progress in terms of:

- increased interaction between children from different ethnic groups
- improved enrolment and performance at school by children from minority ethnic groups, with the knock-on effect of encouraging more parents to enrol their children
- efforts by the school to provide teachers from minority ethnic groups and classes specifically for these groups.

One NGO, the Lifeline Education Resource Development Centre (Kaduna state) commented that Fulani children now attend school because they have a Fulani class with a Fulani teacher.

Respondents identified a number of actions they felt would improve minority ethnic children's access to schooling, such as recruiting mobile teachers (who would move when the children do) and building water points in schools as an incentive to attend. Some children feel unsafe travelling long distances to get to school, and some teachers do not fully understand these children's difficulties in getting to school, which often means they arrive late. While separate classes for children from certain ethnic groups may have certain benefits, care needs to be taken that they do not end up reinforcing these children's isolation from other groups, cultures and languages.

One civil society group, WOKFEI, in Kwara state, and its government partners encouraged Fulani girls to attend school by supporting the SBMC's efforts to encourage *"the parents/family members of the girls to accompany them to school through the bush, where they are afraid the girls may be ambushed or attacked"*.

REFLECTION

Solving all issues around the exclusion of minority ethnic children may be beyond the capacity of SBMCs. Civil society and government partners must continue to support SBMCs to develop skills in approaching and working with organisations from other sectors, such as water and sanitation providers.

SBMC training and mentoring may also need a stronger emphasis on the needs of minority groups. ESSPIN could provide technical support on training materials.

WORKING CHILDREN

Children who are out of school because they need to work to contribute to their family income (through market trading or hawking, for instance) is a common issue, and one that SBMCs are well placed to tackle. They are trying to find localised solutions that recognise families' economic needs while upholding children's right to a quality education.

House girls (who work for wealthier families, mainly in Lagos) are often out of school; those who are enrolled often arrive late due to their workloads in the mornings. SBMC advocacy efforts with families and employers have enabled more girls to attend on time and/or stay in school longer.

At one primary school in Kano state, the SBMC has tried to end children's involvement in hawking by giving families money to cover uniform, books, etc, so they don't send their children to hawk to raise these funds. Other SBMCs have focused on advocating with parents to send their children to school (potentially asking them to make choices that could reduce family income and standard of living).



Girls at an SBMC-supported school in Kano state. One of the aims of SBMCs is to increase girls' enrolment and retention in school.

REFLECTIONS

Given the scale of the problem in enabling working children to attend school, the mixed picture from the research – with pockets of success and areas of persistent challenge – is not surprising. It may be best for SBMCs to focus on reducing the effects of children's work on their education and free time.

SBMCs, together with government and civil society, need to find innovative ways to support working children's education (such as changing school timetables or term dates, or arranging evening catch-up lessons). If SBMCs are already doing things to mitigate the impact of work on children's education, ESSPIN and state partners should encourage them to be documented and shared.

CHILDREN AFFECTED BY DISABILITIES

Inclusive education training is part of the mentoring support package to SBMCs. However, children affected by disabilities, as an excluded group, were only mentioned by three stakeholder groups (in Kwara and Kaduna). Two of these commented that there is now more care and assistance for children affected by disabilities, and that more children affected by disabilities come to school (in Kwara,

one disabled child had enrolled in a primary school as a result of the SBMC sensitising the community on inclusive education).

No views were expressed on the participation and achievement of children affected by disabilities in education. This suggests that children affected by disabilities are still considered in terms of access to school but not yet in terms of their full inclusion in, and benefiting equally from, the learning process.

REFLECTION

Civil society organisations and government partners need to strengthen their efforts on inclusive education to move beyond providing access for individual children to reconfiguring the existing education set-up (moving towards integrated education). This may involve systemic change so that schools and the education system become flexible enough to support the presence, participation and achievement of all children, including those affected by disabilities.

States should undertake investigations as to why children affected by disabilities are not yet routinely part of SBMCs' work on reaching out-of-school children. Taking action on inclusion for children affected by disabilities should be an integral part of the SBMC role.



A teacher with one of her pupils at an SBMC-supported school in Lagos state

GIRLS AND GENDER ISSUES

SBMCs are generally credited with helping to increase girls' enrolment, retention and attendance, through raising parents' awareness of girls' right to education as well as the benefits of educating girls. SBMCs are doing this in different ways, including:

- providing financial support to girls from poorer families to help with buying uniforms, etc
- providing informal evening or early morning classes
- building school facilities closer to villages.

In Nigeria, early marriage is common, even of girls as young as 11, so SBMCs advocate with parents to allow girls to stay in school until 15 or 16. They have also advocated with parents for pregnant girls to be allowed back into school.

However, as with the issue of working children, it may be beyond the scope of SBMCs to aim to significantly reduce the prevalence of child marriage. While some respondents claimed that SBMCs had contributed to a reduction in child marriage, the details of how they did this were vague (eg, "sensitising parents").

REFLECTION

Information gaps on how SBMCs are approaching gender issues could indicate that they are not yet reflecting on their own practices in a way that is easy for them to analyse and share. They may need further support to do this so that experiences and learning are shared across and within states.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS

At one primary school in Jigawa, getting parents more involved and supportive was attributed to the SBMC holding 'enlightenment meetings' every two to four weeks. *"There has been a great improvement in attendance. Even distant communities' children are attending."*

Many respondents referred to SBMCs' work with parents in terms of 'general level' interventions (ie, raising awareness, holding meetings, etc). These

activities are valuable; however, there needs to be more targeted intervention with parents to address specific barriers in a particular context.

REFLECTION

It is encouraging that parents are members of many SBMCs and are encouraging other parents to uphold their children's right to education. However, some committees still tend to view parents as part of the problem – who need to be 'told what to do'.

SBMCs may need further support to develop parent-led advocacy (including setting up parent networks) to increase enrolment and attendance. This kind of approach would enable SBMCs to embrace parents and see them as an essential part of the solution.

CHILD-TO-CHILD ACTIVITIES

"Hawking would not stop you from going to school, and school would not stop you from hawking [you can do them at different times]."

(Head girl explaining to other children, Hayin Banki School, Kaduna North)

SBMCs initiated in Kaduna, Kwara, Lagos, Jigawa and Kano states are designed to have children's inputs, and state guidebooks for SBMCs highlight the importance of forming children's committees to enhance children's participation.

Respondents provided a few insights into children (those who are and are not directly involved in the SBMC) helping excluded peers to enrol in or attend school. One civil society organisation in Kwara noted that general improvements made by SBMCs have a potential knock-on effect, whereby children who enjoy being at school tell their peers about it and encourage them to attend. Not all the child-to-child activities mentioned resulted in excluded children coming to school, although some children were reported as teaching out-of-school friends.

REFLECTION

Child-to-child activities can play an important part in bringing excluded children into school, yet their potential could be explored much further. ESSPIN may have a role to play in supporting government partners, civil society groups and SBMCs to think more progressively about children's participation and to develop more child-led initiatives.

LANGUAGE ISSUES

Addressing language barriers that prevent some children attending and achieving at school is crucial in a country where hundreds of languages are spoken. A school's language of instruction, and the (un)availability of teachers who can speak children's mother tongues, are common factors explaining children's exclusion from education.

However, language barriers were not widely raised by respondents, although some highlighted the need for teachers who speak certain languages and for interpreters when SBMCs and education staff are doing 'mobilisation work'.

REFLECTION

Few SBMCs or other stakeholders discussed language barriers keeping children out of school or any activities being taken to address them. This could be because SBMCs see the issues as beyond their remit, or as a policy issue that primarily requires government leadership and action.

Civil society and government partners may need to consider how they can provide further support to SBMCs to enable them to identify and respond to language-related barriers, even if only at the level of advocacy, if direct action proves beyond their capacity.

3. STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION

SBMCs have clearly worked hard to engage with parents and the community to promote key messages about education – with positive results. In many areas, there is now greater sense of mutual responsibility for improving education, and greater sense of community ownership of local schools.

RAISING COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Thanks to the SBMC in one school in Kwara, *“Parents now understand the education system better and why they should educate their children.”* And in a primary school in Kano, parents now have a *“better understanding of the school’s problems”*.

Some respondents spoke about SBMCs’ efforts to ‘sensitise’ or ‘enlighten’ parents and other community members about education-related issues. Care should be taken that this does not become a ‘top-down’ approach of telling ‘ignorant’ parents what to do in terms of their children’s schooling. The SBMCs’ role is to give information about the importance of schooling for children, enabling parents to reflect on what they are doing and consider doing things differently.

REFLECTION

SBMCs are making good progress in bringing parents on board but need to avoid using language which might imply that parents are ignorant. Raising awareness of the importance of education in the community should be a ‘bottom-up’ process. Stakeholders should try to ensure that there is a balance between SBMCs ‘giving the community a message’ and engaging the community by ‘asking what families think about education’, or any other issues such as excluded groups and child labour, for instance.

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

In a relatively short space of time, SBMCs have made impressive strides in improving community ownership of schools, which has mobilised valuable resources for improvements. Many respondents cited evidence such as improved financial control, meetings initiated by the community, and a greater sense of care for the school, all of which confirm this growing sense of community ownership.

There has been significant progress in building a sense of community ownership:

“The relationship will stand because the school is ours, the children are ours, and the teachers are ours.”

(School in Kaduna)

“If the parents and teachers are not carried along, [we] will still experience the same problems.”

(School SBMC cluster in Lagos)

It is important that this momentum is maintained and built upon, so that the process remains a genuinely empowering one based on strong participation from children, parents, teachers, and other interested parties.

Ongoing efforts to support practical experience exchanges within and between SBMCs will help increasing numbers of stakeholders to understand and see for themselves what ownership looks like in practice.

REFLECTION

State government has an important role to play here, and should support SBMCs to challenge any barriers that undermine community ownership (eg, slow government responses when the school ‘owners’ have identified a problem).

Government and other stakeholders should also support exchanges between SBMCs to strengthen members’ capacity to recognise what community ownership looks like in practice, in terms of how the school, parents, children, and the community work together.

TEACHERS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMUNITIES

All stakeholders who mentioned relationships between teachers and parents or other community members felt there had been improvements since the SBMCs had been doing their work. They cited improved coordination and cooperation between teachers and parents, with some suggesting that attendance had increased as a result.

In one school in Kaduna, the SBMC has led to “better cooperation between parents, children and teachers”. In Lagos, one school cluster commented that: “Cooperation between parents, teachers and pupils has increased attendance.”

REFLECTION

Research participants painted a very positive picture of improving relations between school staff and the community. All stakeholders, including community leaders, headteachers, SBMCs, local government, and civil society partners, should continue to support improved relations between teachers and parents and others based on mutual respect.

CHILDREN AND PARENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN THE EDUCATION PROCESS

Some respondents suggested that the work SBMCs have done to improve their schools has made children more interested and eager to attend school, with knock-on effects within their families. Children seem to be more inclined to share what they learn at school with other family members when they get home. Some noted an improvement in punctuality too.

There were also comments that parents are now having more of a say in how the local school is run (and are being listened to), which means they are taking a closer interest in what their children are learning at school. Many schools, with SBMC support, have developed systems for parents to check their children's work, and thus monitor their progress and the quality of teaching and learning in the school.

“Before, children abandoned their books once they got home. But now, they are eager to do their homework and also ask for assistance from their older brothers and sisters.”

(Kaduna North)



A children's SBMC committee meeting at a school in Kwara state.

4. PROMOTING THE VOICE OF EXCLUDED GROUPS

Some research participants commented on the fact that excluded groups such as women, children and nomadic herders were gaining more of a voice (although they did not comment on whether they were being heard) and becoming more involved in SBMC meetings and activities. But they made no mention of other excluded groups.

SBMC guidebooks state that there should be separate women's committees, but that women are also to be represented in the main SBMC, with a 'mainstream' voice too. However, as already recognised, including a requirement for female membership does not automatically ensure women's inclusion.

While women seem to be becoming more involved in what SBMCs do, this does not automatically mean they have more of a voice. Some civil society organisations suggested that, given the scale of the challenge, SBMCs achievements in increasing women

and children's participation in particular perhaps needs to be re-defined, as even the representation of women on an SBMC can be viewed as major progress compared with the situation previously.

We now look at the involvement of women and children in SBMCs and their activities.

WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT AND WOMEN'S COMMITTEES

Some of the women's committees attached to SBMCs have been very active in promoting education and raising school funds (eg, for teachers, materials, equipment, as well as support for individual children). Some have done extensive work to raise parents' (especially mothers') awareness of education and encouraging them to send their children to school. In general, however, women and girls were not yet playing an equal role in the SBMCs. They were significantly under-represented, and those who were involved may not have attended meetings regularly, or felt free to speak in mixed company.



Girls playing at an SBMC-supported school in Jigawa state.

In one school in Kwara, the women's committee *"mobilises pupils to come to school"* and *"assists in providing school uniforms and PTA levy to pupils who are less privileged"*.

One primary school in Kano reported that there are 13 men and four women on the SBMC. Women often don't attend because they are busy, and because of cultural norms that deter women from speaking in front of their husbands.

Members of one cluster in Lagos said that women don't attend SBMC meetings *"because they are at the market"*, and only two out of 11 members are women anyway.

Although women are generally becoming more involved in SBMCs and their community mobilising work, there is still an enormous amount of work to do to increase women's equal participation in SBMCs and give them a genuine voice in decisions. This is a major challenge, especially in communities where it has not been deemed appropriate for men and women to sit together and discuss issues.

Giving a genuine voice to women, children and other excluded groups will need continual support and emphasis on the part of all stakeholders if SBMCs are to become truly representative of the wider community. Supporting separate SBMC committees for women and children is an appropriate strategy as long as these committees build stronger representation in the main committee – otherwise their existence will be little more than tokenistic. Other initiatives could aim to capitalise on women's committees' links to other women's associations in the local community, thereby giving women more voice, both in terms of education and other aspects of community life.

REFLECTION

Women (and girls) are still significantly under-represented in SBMCs (as in other spheres of community life), stemming from deeply rooted inequalities in gender relations. Those women who are involved may not be able to attend meetings regularly or may not feel able to speak freely in the presence of men. SBMC women's committees are one solution, and these are reportedly very active. However, the extent to which the committee activities feed into the main SBMC was unclear.

SBMCs can also be supported to find practical solutions to some of the cultural and workload barriers preventing women participating. Respondents discussed holding meetings in community meeting places rather than in the chief's house, and at times when women were more likely to be able to attend.

Separate women's committee meetings before the main SBMC meeting would enable women to discuss agenda items and reach a consensus view, thus enabling a stronger group voice, but there have to be clear mechanisms for them to feed their views into the main committee. Civil society and government partners have a role to play in strengthening such mechanisms.

CHILDREN'S INVOLVEMENT AND CHILDREN'S COMMITTEES

In many communities, the concept of children's participation in improving education is new, and they are welcoming it. But longstanding cultural traditions that deter children from speaking in front of adults persist, so the programme is aiming to build participation from a low or even non-existent base.

Initially, children in one cluster in Lagos were quiet and “fearful” of speaking at SBMC meetings, but members “*encourage them to speak and they now speak*”.

At a primary school in Kano, five children attend SBMC meetings, consulting with their peers beforehand, and speaking at the meetings without being prompted.

But children at a primary school in Lagos admitted they would be “*afraid to tell them [the SBMC] about the beatings*”.

SBMC guidebooks state that there should be separate children’s committees and that the head boy and girl should feed the committee’s views into the main SBMC. However, the qualitative research carried out, which used participatory, child-friendly methods to gather children’s views and ideas, suggested that children’s participation is still far from what is being aimed for. That said, some children are participating actively in SBMCs and some children’s committees are allowing children to voice their opinions. Some children are consulting their peers to be able to represent their views at SBMC meetings, and adults are beginning to appreciate the value of children’s views. This is a major achievement.

However, care needs to be taken that child representatives on SBMCs are not merely used to communicate things that adults want them to among their peers. SBMCs that support school clusters may need to give further consideration to how best to facilitate children’s meaningful participation, given the logistical challenges. This may be resolved by making all SBMCs school-based rather than cluster-based (mainly affecting Lagos state).

Children are clearly participating in some SBMCs. But only two are selected to attend (the head boy and head girl), and they may not have the confidence and skills to speak in front of a large group of adults about potentially sensitive topics. Peer support (in terms of more numbers of children attending) might help. SBMCs could also consider using different, creative forms of communication such as photos/video or drama and role-play. One interesting suggestion made

by some children was that a neutral adult (perhaps from a civil society organisation) could attend the meetings to support and encourage children to speak up, almost acting as a mentor to the children.

REFLECTION

There is a wealth of experience on developing mechanisms to support children’s meaningful participation in school development and governance, so that children and young people can exercise their right to have a say in decisions affecting their lives. Further attention needs to be given to what happens after SBMC training on children’s participation and voice, to enable this to be put into practice. Given the context, SBMCs need to consider practical ways to enable and support children’s participation (acting on children’s own ideas), and how they can contribute to challenging deeply held cultural beliefs about children speaking in front of adults.

5. HOLDING DUTY-BEARERS TO ACCOUNT

SBMCs have approached government for support, and played an important role in improving the presence, behaviour and management of teachers. Some SBMCs have received positive responses from government.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND CAPACITY

Research participants gave numerous examples of how the programme has helped SBMC members build their confidence, enabling them to hold others to account.

One SBMC member at a school in Kaduna commented that, “*Through training, we now know our rights to advocate and solicit.*” The same SBMC refused to allow its headteacher to be transferred away without its permission.



Children at an SBMC-supported school in Lagos state. SBMCs encourage children to support each other in their learning.

The legal status conferred on SBMCs has helped, as has the training for SBMC members around children's rights to education and how to lobby. Civil society organisations are playing a valuable support role in this confidence-building process. They "...have supported SBMCs to identify the relevant person/authority to help them with their requests and challenges, therefore building a more sustainable approach where requests are made to relevant authorities and response expected" (ESSPIN, *Community Engagement and Learner Participation Output 4*, December 2010).

HOLDING TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF TO ACCOUNT

The way teachers behave in the classroom and the quality of teaching are among the biggest factors in increasing the 'demand' side of education (promoting increased enrolment and retention), and this is an area where SBMCs seem to be having the strongest or most visible impact. At all schools, stakeholders commented that, in some way, the SBMC (and in some cases parents too) is involved in observing lesson quality, or other classroom checks. In particular, SBMCs are holding teachers accountable for their punctuality, attendance, commitment and behaviour, with some research participants citing a reduction in complaints about beatings, and improved teaching practices such as group work and child-centred methods.

At one school in Kwara, the SBMC used to have complaints about children being beaten, but not any more.

Girls at a school in Kano noted that "*bad behaviours by teachers towards us have stopped because they know the SBMC will take action*" (ESSPIN, *Position Paper: Community Engagement – March 2011*).

And according to the children's committee at a school in Kaduna, teachers are now more patient and encouraging; they are not late and don't beat the children.

However, some problems (such as beating and other forms of abuse) are ongoing, and SBMCs may need further support to address this fundamental violation of children's rights. Some respondents also mentioned the need to continue to monitor teachers to ensure that teaching is child-centred and gender-sensitive.

Finally, this issue emphasises the importance of enabling children to have a voice in SBMCs, so that they can raise problems that adults may not be aware of, or feel to be a priority.



SBMC members receive support at a school in Kwara state.

REFLECTION

Government departments, including the Department of Social Mobilisation and School Services, could do more to forge effective links to improve classroom practices and tackle abusive practices by ensuring that SBMCs have the knowledge, skills, remit and personal beliefs/commitment to challenge physical punishment. All stakeholders need to be supported to place greater emphasis on listening to children's views so that more children can challenge bad treatment, and are respected by adults.

There may be a role for SBMCs that have raised problems with teacher behaviour in their schools and with relevant government agencies and achieved a suitable conclusion, to share their experiences with others who may be less confident in tackling these difficult issues. Consulting on and adopting a teachers' code of conduct has proved successful in other contexts and could be promoted in SBMC schools.

HOLDING PARENTS TO ACCOUNT

The research found evidence that SBMCs are beginning to help parents fulfil their key role in realising their children's rights to education. Some parents are getting involved with raising or advocating for school resources and helping to monitor the quality and quantity of children's learning. Some are making sure that their children arrive at school punctually, and arrive clean and appropriately dressed.

"The parents are more aware now and are making sure the children are on time," noted one school cluster in Lagos.

HOLDING GOVERNMENT TO ACCOUNT

This is perhaps the biggest challenge facing SBMCs as they strive to deliver improvements in access, quality and equity of education. SBMCs are trying to hold government to account as one of the main duty-bearers in providing quality education. There have been many positive responses to date, giving vital momentum to the school and community's efforts to make improvements. SBMCs are holding government to account by:

- sending written requests for support, often followed by personal visits to government offices
- approaching key individuals in government agencies to ask for help
- attending meetings with government officials in the LGEA or State Universal Basic Education Board
- tightening financial controls so that school funds cannot be misappropriated
- getting civil society organisations to support requests by writing joint letters
- where possible, finding a 'champion' within the government agency who can help push the case.

One SBMC school cluster in Lagos reported that the Social Mobilisation Officer and Education Secretary within the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) *"always listen... When a classroom roof collapsed, the SBMC spoke to the Education Secretary and he acted."*

"If you want to do something you must write" to the LGEA. But the LGEA "lacks commitment... They don't answer letters."

One SBMC in Jigawa had managed to find a 'champion' in the LGEA who supports their work and helps to get things done.

REFLECTION

An SBMC forum, which would bring SBMCs together to submit requests to LGEA representatives, may be a more effective and less time-consuming mechanism for SBMCs and LGEAs alike to present and consider an initial response to requests.

Lack of government funding for schools, especially at local level, means that government response is inevitably limited. Poor communication or overly bureaucratic procedures do not help, but these could be changed. Written requests as well as those made in person are often ignored, and together, these can be very demotivating for the school and the local community.

Civil society and government partners must work with SBMCs to improve and streamline communication channels for making requests to government, which should aim to provide a faster response, whether positive or negative. Accountability requires that the SBMC feels it has been listened to and that its request has been respected and considered.

There is also more scope for civil society organisations to support SBMCs to help them prepare written funding requests with adequate plans and budgets, as well as on advocacy, to strengthen their voice.

6. MAKING SBMCs SUSTAINABLE

There are many positive indications that the SBMC model can be sustained after external support ends. Demand for SBMC activity has increased, monitoring of SBMCs' work has improved, and support for further development is planned. A number of research participants indicated that they do not feel dependent on ESSPIN for their SBMC's survival.

REPLICATING SBMCs

A major part of the ESSPIN SBMC development process has focused on capacity building, mentoring and sustainability, so that the work of the committees and other stakeholders, and its impact, can continue after external support ends.

Some research participants commented that schools in LGEAs that were not part of ESSPIN have begun implementing their own initiatives after learning about the work of the SBMCs. In Kwara, “replication into new LGEAs came about as the result of advocacy, high-level engagement and reporting by the State Task Team”, which led to the Commissioner advocating for replication in the remaining 12 LGEAs of the state. Social Mobilisation Officers from these LGEAs had received training paid for by state resources (ESSPIN, *Position Paper: Community Engagement – March 2011*).

The SBMC process is now being scaled up. During 2012, it is being adopted more widely within ESSPIN-supported states and is being rolled out nationally through the federal Universal Basic Education Commission.

In Kwara, one Social Mobilisation Officer suggested that they could help replicate SBMCs in other LGEAs as they now know how to set them up.

In Lagos, it is now state policy for each school to have its own SBMC, rather than using the cluster system.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN KEY PLAYERS

Good working relationships between the main stakeholders in the SBMC process are critical to its success, but also one of the most challenging aspects. Research participants expressed mixed views about the nature of their relationships with government departments and officials.

“[After some initial] reluctance to the idea of a civil society-government partnership... coordinators in Jigawa and Kwara states highlighted a more equal partnership than at the beginning of the process, with civil society organisations better understanding how to support their government partners, and government partners realising the benefits of working alongside civil society to improve education for all children.”

(ESSPIN, *Community Engagement and School Governance Output 4*, December 2010)

“[CSOs] have indicated that the relationship [with government agencies] is working well and that a great deal of trust now exists... It has been a learning process that has been worthwhile and yielded positive results to date for education delivery.”

(ESSPIN, *Community Engagement April 2010 – March 2011: Early Evidence of Impact*)



A classroom at an SBMC-supported school in Kaduna state

Relationships between civil society organisations (CSOs) and government agencies (specifically in relation to the SBMC process) have not always been positive but have been improving in the past couple of years, and this progress in the right direction needs to be built on. Respondents cited numerous problems, including government mistrust of CSOs (especially at LGEA level and on the part of education secretaries), resistance to the perceived challenges presented by CSOs, and a perception of CSOs as not separate entities from ESSPIN. However, while significant problems remain, respondents from CSOs and government commented that relationships were beginning to improve – something that is supported by ESSPIN documents. Respondents from government agencies reported slightly more positive views of the relationship with CSOs, talking of ‘synergy’ and ‘mutual understanding’.

ESSPIN’s technical support role was generally welcomed. Some felt ESSPIN could do more to inform people about available training, and could get more involved in advocacy work. CSOs have played a key role in training and mentoring SBMCs, and providing ongoing support to their development. Their non-governmental status has been a key benefit to SBMCs, as it means they can tackle issues that government staff may not be able to. Some participants also credited CSOs with promoting a voluntary spirit within SBMCs and local communities more generally. Respondents frequently mentioned good working relationships between CSOs and Social Mobilisation Officers, based on mutual collaboration and support.

REFLECTION

After a sometimes shaky and distrustful start, there has been solid progress in relationship-building between SBMCs, CSOs and government, each recognising the benefits of working together to improve the education system. As the SBMC model is rolled out and external support ends, continuing support will be needed to strengthen these relationships and build on the trust that has been established. This could involve supporting state governments to contract and fund CSO contributions to SBMC development and local resource planning.

COALITIONS, FORUMS AND NETWORKS

A few research participants commented that SBMCs have begun to collaborate with each other on their own initiative. For instance, in Kaduna, SBMC representatives from 12 schools meet each month to share experiences and discuss challenges. And one LGEA in Kano has formed an SBMC network, where representatives from individual SBMCs discuss training, mentoring and other issues, which are then reported back to the Education Secretary and LGEA.

“Three LGEA SBMC forums have been planned... bring[ing] SBMC representatives together with LGA and LGEA representatives to talk about common and urgent issues and support needs with education improvement.”

(ESSPIN, *Community Engagement April 2010 – March 2011: Early Evidence of Impact*)

REFLECTION

Coalitions and networking are an important way of helping SBMCs become stronger and more sustainable. There is considerable scope for sharing experience and supporting skills development – for instance, with preparing written funding requests and budgets – as well as discussing challenges and identifying ways to address them. The SBMC forums planned within each LGEA under the next phase of ESSPIN should be prioritised for support.

PROSPECTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Various research participants spoke about future plans for SBMCs and commented on their sustainability after external support comes to an end. Some felt that the work is becoming 'institutionalised' as a regular task of other agencies, and that CSOs would seek to maintain the momentum and help expand the model to other schools that had not benefited from ESSPIN inputs.

"We not only plan to continue in the afterwards [post-ESSPIN] but also to share best practice with other communities that were not able to benefit from this training."

(SBMC meeting, Kaduna North)

And as two research participants in Lagos said, the schools and communities *"will still be there, they are not leaving, so it [SBMC work] will continue. Many are very committed and volunteer."*

Some respondents reiterated that government agencies and staff would need to play their part in helping to sustain the work of the SBMCs and to ensure that they go from strength to strength. Some also emphasised the importance of getting parents and children more involved to ensure that SBMCs are truly sustainable.

REFLECTION

On the whole, respondents presented a very positive picture for the future of SBMCs after external support ends. This is very encouraging given the range of barriers that were mentioned in key areas such as bureaucratic delays in accessing government funding, and the challenges of promoting genuine participation by all groups of children and adults.

ESSPIN should continue to engage with federal and state government to replicate the development of SBMCs while at the same time striving to improve in key areas, notably:

- strengthening children's and women's participation
- continuing progress on inclusion of children affected by disabilities
- supporting positive methods of classroom discipline
- supporting government to respond consistently to SBMC-led demands
- linking resource flows to issues identified by communities.

CONCLUSIONS

Developing community-led involvement in education is a process that can take years if not decades. But there is no doubt that the SBMCs that were trained and activated by ESSPIN have achieved impressive results in a number of key areas in a relatively short space of time. This should give cause for great encouragement as the model is extended to all Local Government Education Authorities in the six states and rolled out nationally.

However, there are still many challenges that need to be addressed, and one of the biggest is the level of state funding for the education system. There is considerable frustration within schools and communities at the perceived lack of government inputs (including funds) and enthusiasm to match the impressive early efforts of SBMCs and their local communities. Despite its potential, the SBMC process does not negate the need for more government funds, and a more regular flow of funds, to provide the resources schools need to deliver a quality education for all children. Realising this goal will require greater political commitment at national, state and local levels, and ESSPIN may have a role to play in trying to help secure this commitment.

Going forward, there also needs to be greater emphasis on promoting the voices of women and children and other disadvantaged groups to participate, building on what has already been

achieved, so that they can gain a stronger voice in their communities and have more of a say in decisions that affect their lives – something that clearly goes beyond the education sector and will involve broader changes in society that again are likely to take many years to bring about.

The next steps for the development of SBMCs require stronger engagement with, and greater support from, civil society organisations and government at different levels. Increased local engagement as a result of ESSPIN is already having some positive knock-on effects. In Lagos, for instance, civil society organisations that have worked with government partners and ESSPIN are joining wider networks where they can carry out advocacy on some of the key issues raised in their work supporting SBMCs – mainly improving school infrastructure, promoting inclusive education, and quality of teaching. And there is increasing momentum towards setting up SBMC forums within each local education authority, where stakeholders from SBMCs, government, and civil society organisations can share their experiences and discuss the main issues and problems.

No doubt other issues and challenges will emerge as the programme is rolled out across the country, but ESSPIN-supported SBMCs have clearly made a promising start on which all stakeholders can build to realise the goal of improved access, quality and equity in education for all children.

APPENDIX I: SUMMARY OF SBMC ACHIEVEMENTS

CATEGORIES OF PROGRESS REPORTED IN COMMUNITIES WITH ESSPIN-ACTIVATED SBMCs

Resource mobilisation and management	More children in school	Community empowerment
SBMCs have mobilised resources from the local community (Reported by community, government, CSOs)	School enrolment has increased due to SBMC activity (Reported by community, CSOs)	SBMCs have taken a problem-solving approach (Reported by community, government, CSOs)
SBMCs have improved school infrastructure and environment (Reported by community, government, CSOs, children)	School attendance has been increased by SBMC activity (Reported by community, CSOs)	Mutual responsibility for improving education has increased (Reported by community, government)
SBMCs have delivered more teaching and learning resources (Reported by community, government, CSOs)	Working children's attendance has been increased by SBMCs (Reported by community, government, CSOs)	Community sense of ownership of education has been increased (Reported by community, government, CSOs)
SBMCs have secured resources from government (Reported by community, government, CSOs)	Girls' attendance has been increased by SBMC activity (Reported by community, government, CSOs)	
	Attendance of children affected by disabilities has been increased by SBMC activity (Reported by community, CSOs)	

- High incidence: over three-quarters of school community stakeholders consulted reported the issue
- Medium incidence: reported by approximately half of school community stakeholders
- Low incidence: reported by a third or less of stakeholders
- Very low incidence: reported by two groups of stakeholders

Women's and children's voices	Duty-bearers held to account	Sustaining SBMC development
Women have been involved in SBMC and school improvement activity (Reported by community, government, CSOs)	SBMCs have approached government for support (Reported by community, government, CSOs)	Demand for SBMC activity has increased (Reported by community, government, CSOs)
Children have been involved in SBMC work and school improvement (Reported by community, CSOs, children)	SBMCs have improved teacher management and presence (Reported by community, government, CSOs)	Monitoring of SBMCs' work has improved (Reported by government, CSOs)
Children have been given a genuine voice in education (Reported by community, CSOs)	SBMC activity has improved teacher behaviour (Reported by community, CSOs, children)	Support for further SBMC development is in place (Reported by government, CSOs)
Women have been given a genuine voice in education (Reported by community, CSOs)	SBMCs have secured good responses from government (Reported by community, government, CSOs)	

COMMUNITY VOICE FOR BETTER SCHOOLS

School-based management committees
improving schools in Nigeria
Summary of a qualitative research study

Community Voice for Better Schools is a summary of a qualitative research report on stakeholders' views of the impact of support given to school-based management committees (SBMCs) in five Nigerian states.

In all five states SBMCs were found to be increasing children's enrolment and attendance, including that of girls and children affected by disabilities. They have also improved teachers' attendance and behaviour, tackling corporal punishment and supporting vulnerable children back into school. Communities are more involved in improving and maintaining their schools, and women have a voice in their children's education.

With 8 million children out of school and millions more leaving school without basic skills, making education fully accessible and accountable in Nigeria will take time. But the evidence suggests that the prospects are bright for SBMCs to help transform education for poor and excluded children.

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