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The Role of Teachers Resources Centre in Teaching

William Chipeta

Oxfam, Tanzania

P.O Box 787

Shinyanga

Email: wchipeta@oxfam.org.uk

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Introduction

Oxfam has been implementing the Education Quality Improvement Through Pedagogy (EQUIP) Programme in Shinyanga District and Shinyanga Municipal, Councils. The main goal for the programme has been to improve the quality of education in Shinyanga through putting the child at the centre of learning processes. To achieve that, EQUIP's main focus was to provide field-based teacher's in service training. There have been significant changes in terms of teachers' professionalism and academic growth. There have been notable changes in teachers' performance as well as pupils' performance which can be attributed to Teachers Resource Centres (TRC). Apart from teacher's in-service training the programme had other interventions like; carrying on water and sanitation programme, supplying teaching and learning materials, and mentoring.

Current Situation In Education: Poor Teacher Qualifications

For many reasons, inadequate teaching training at college and improper selection of candidates who join the teaching profession, some of them do not have adequate skills and knowledge to pursue their teaching. However teaching is a lifelong learning career.

Very few teachers will have an opportunity to go back to teachers colleges for refresher training. Some of the major reasons could be limited resources in terms of finance but time factor also. Teachers cannot afford to leave their classes for a long stay in college for in-service training. Sedere in his 2008 Equip Programme Final evaluation Report says:

TRC is the logical hub of in-service activities for all schools within a school cluster. The Head teachers and teachers are directly served by the TRC. Therefore, TRC has to be positioned above the level of a primary school as the apex of the cluster level institutions. The Ward Education Coordinator also could be affiliated with the TRC to increase its credibility. However, the TRC need to be seen as a mini-Teacher Training Unit and logically it should be placed under the guidance of the nearest Teachers College'

The evaluation insists that the TRC be used as quoted above foster in-service training

2.2 Students' Performance

Following international polices of education for all, the numbers of pupils have dramatically increased beyond the schools capacities to accommodate them. The facilities and resources have not tallied with an increase in schooling beneficiaries. As a result students' attainment of desired learning outcomes by both primary and secondary students is a big issue of concern. The study conducted by UWEZO in

2011 conspicuously indicated a very poor levels of attainment by primary and secondary students. In many cases one of the reasons for this is poor teaching

2.3 Progression to higher Levels of Education

Today a very significant number of STD VII (50%) leavers proceed with secondary education. That number drops as learners proceed to upper levels of education. This means a bigger number of people out of the education circles is higher than that of people involved in formal and non- formal arrangements.

2.4 Availability of Learning Resources

In Shinyanga District so far, there does not exist government constructed TRC. This applies to school libraries. The issue may not be scarcity of resources but recognition and will by the government to invest in such facilities. TRCs and school libraries are not considered to be as important as classroom and teachers. The reality is that TRC and school libraries under open and distance learning initiatives, feature as very important source of materials.

2.5 Role Of Civil Society Organizations

The period between 2006 - 2008, Oxfam constructed 5 TRCs and renovated 7 TRCs, The TRCs were equipped with assorted book materials. The purchase of book materials based on the prior suggestions obtained from users. The books are for both teachers' professional development as well academic upgrading. The reading material cater for diverse needs and levels. Thus secondary school students, teachers (primary and secondary schools) and community members use TRCs.

Oxfam has embraced Information and Communication Technology (ICT) developments, that is why some TRCs were equipped with Information Technology (IT) facilities such as computers, printers and photocopiers. Where the national grid existed, the TRCs were connected to electricity. The solar panels and generators were provided to TRCs without alternative source of energy. Kambarage TRC was connected to internet to enable teachers search for materials. Twelve TRCs coordinators were trained on basic computer skills to enable them use internet and email services. With current development in IT, it makes possible for all centres with IT facilities to access internet through modems.

3.0 Achievements

A good number of achievements have been registered as a result of TRCs. Shamdoe the Coordinator of Tinder TRC was quoted saying;

'We have around ten teachers who have joined universities. Amongst them, one is proceeding with a master's degree. They are a product of this centre. Our centre is very often used by teachers who are preparing themselves for Qualifying Test, Form 4 and 6 National Examination and those hold weekend seminars.'

Discussions with other TRCs coordinator provide a similar stories of success.

TRC provide text books and supplementary materials for reading. They have assisted teachers in preparing their lessons though that way improving their teaching.

Through meetings held at TRCs, teachers have been able to exchange experiences and expertise of teaching difficult subjects. Through that way the academic and professional standards have improved as well as pupils' performance.

The TRCs coordinators have been capacitated to facilitate workshops and communities. Recently, the Coordinator for Kambarage TRC facilitated communities in Kishapu (EQUIP has scaled up in Kishapu District) on TRCs support and use.

4.0 Challenges

Much as teachers' upgrading is necessary, it has some challenges too. The majority of those who upgrade take are bias on the academic side because they would like to change their current employment positions. Thus the TRCs have been experiencing an out-flow of trained coordinators who after their studies do not go back to the TRCs

The TRC is headed by a coordinator as the only permanent office bearer. Ideally the TRC close-by school head teacher automatically becomes the deputy TRC coordinator. It has been difficult for head teachers to effectively support the coordinators as they are very busy with schools administration and management. Very often when the coordinator is not available for some reasons like leave or attending other official duties then the TRC is closed. This applies to weekends whereby TRCs are closed. That denies some readers with an opportunity to use the TRC.

An ideal time for TRC users is in the evening after their official work hours. That contravenes with the coordinator's timetable as it is the time s/he should be closing the TRC.

There has been low additional support from the government especially on the library reading materials. To the largest extent the available materials are donor supported. The current state of affairs threatens the sustainability of the TRCs.

The number of TRC users is still low. One major contributing factor is low readership culture which prevails not only in Shinyanga but countrywide. This is attributed to the schooling system whereby the readership culture is not cultivated from primary

school levels. Schools do not have libraries and looking at the 1997 National Primary school Syllabus, reading is not given a duly emphasis

The TRC board members' qualification limits them to function effectively. This is because people with desired qualifications either do not exist or are not willing to take such volunteering roles.

The TRC catchment area is still too wide. Sometimes it becomes difficult for some interested readers to travel as far as 7 kms to the nearest TRC.

5.0 Recommendations

An increase in the number of TRC staff members is recommended to allow flexibility on the library closure. That would also minimize the chances of book material loses and providing more opportunities to those who wants to study.

The central and local governments should consider TRCs as one very significant space for teachers' academic and professional growth. This can be done by increased staffing and budget allocations for TRCs.

Strong sensitization of communities to read is important. This can be done through different spaces and medium such as meetings and media. Readership habits should be can be cultivated from primary schools.

School libraries should be taken as mandatory in primary and secondary schools. To build the competencies of pupils in self searching for knowledge and building research competencies.

The syllabus need be reviewed to give more time for pupils readership

6.0 Conclusion and Way Forward

6.1 Conclusion

The need for TRCs cannot be over-emphasized at this time when there is a mass failure of pupils and students and many citizens are out of the education systems.

6.2 Recommendations

Oxfam is shifting from the role of service provider to governance and advocacy. The constructed TRCs and school libraries will be used as success cases for advocacy. The focus will be on education budgetary increase. Oxfam will work with others to ensure the communities hold the Government to account for its promises. On the other hand, communities' awareness on its rights and responsibilities will be another area. Community awareness raising for them to understand the importance of school

libraries and TRCs towards quality education is very important. Informed communities will participate in supporting and using the TRCs.

REFERENCES

EQUIP Final Evaluation Report (2008)

EQUIP implementation report

National Syllabus for English in Primary school 1997