

SOUTH AFRICA

Project Title: Improving Parental Involvement in School Activities

Patrick Selebogo (Eddy) Dithebe, Alinah Mookho (Mamiki) Mohapi and Abraham Mokati Ntho

Introduction

Article 18 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child makes a clear statement supporting the primacy of parents that, “Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interest of the child will be the parents’ basic concern. However the state shall use its “best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child”.

It is recognised that parental involvement is a key factor in the enhancement of childrens’ achievement and well-being. Learners are more likely to be motivated, to earn higher grades, to have better behaviour and social skills, and to continue their education to higher level when their parents are actively engaged and involved. It is equally important to recognise that parental involvement could take many forms:

- Serve in School Governing Bodies(SGB)
- Volunteer for school activities such as National School Nutrition Project (NSNP)
- Make sure that there’s a quiet place set aside for learners to do their homework.
- Help their children with homework and ensure that they complete the school work.
- Attend meetings with teachers and express high but realistic expectations for achievement.

- Monitor out of school and classroom activities.
- Coordinate their efforts with teachers to encourage acceptable classroom behaviour.
- Model the value of learning, self-discipline and hard work.

Parental Involvement in school and positive parent-teacher interaction, have been found to positively affect the teachers' self-perception and job satisfaction.

Frame of Reference

Parental involvement in our schools is not up to the desired standards. Very few parents take part in the school activities and many of them stay at home and do not bother to go to school. This is in contravention of Chapter 3 of the South African Children's Act, Act 38/2005 Section 18(2) which states that parental responsibilities and rights that a person may have in respect of a child, include to:

- Care for a child
- Act as guardian of the child.
- Maintain contact with the child.

Country and Regional Strategies

The establishment of the Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign is aimed at the participation of the parents in the decision making at school. This is however, not working as most parents do not attend these meetings.

Values in Education sub-directorate is targeting parents to make them aware of the values enshrined in the Constitution, the rights and responsibilities of learners and how they can take part in the education of their children.

The following CRC articles reflect on parents' responsibilities with regard to the rights of the child:

Article 5

State parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

It provides the Convention on the Rights of the Child with a flexible definition of "family" and introduces two vital concepts: parental responsibilities and the evolving

capacities of the child. It also signals clearly that the Convention regards the child as the active subject of rights, emphasizing the exercise “by the child” of his/her rights. The preamble upholds the family as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and wellbeing of all its members, particularly children. According to Article 6(2) state parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child. The South African government is providing the following for children:

- Grants
- Feeding at schools
- School Uniform to needy learners.
- Free basic education

Free Medical Health Services

In the South African Constitution, (Act 108: Chapter 2:28 (1)(b) of 1996, the following is also proclaimed:

“Every child has the right to family care or parental care or to appropriate alternative care when removed from family environment”

SA Constitution; Chapter 2:28(1)(f); “ every child has the right not to be required or permitted to perform work or provide services that (ii) place at risk the child’s wellbeing, education, physical or mental health or spiritual, moral or social development.

It is in this context that we deem it necessary to improve parental involvement and cooperation for conducive learning and teaching environment in the best interest of the child. Our responsibility as change agents is to ensure that all parents take an active role in the education of the child.

Baseline

The project has been conducted in two different schools, one primary school (Matla) and one secondary school (Ntemoseng). When the project started the situation was similar in the two schools. Most parents did not take an active part in the learning of the learners. When they were called to meetings, they would not come and others would cite many reasons. Male parents were stereotype of the fact that only female parents were responsible to attend to their children’s education.

Matla Primary School

Matla Primary School is in the Free State Province in Bloemfontein. Before the project few parents took part in the normal learning and teaching of their children. They were expected to come to the school on the following occasions:

- When called by the teachers if the child has misbehaved.
- When the teacher wanted to discuss the academic progress of the learner.
- When there was a parents' meeting.
- When important days were celebrated.
- When they were expected to assist with school activities.



Parents and stakeholders meeting in partnership with Woolworths Trust

Phase six is a semi-rural area where it is established as an informal settlement. It is an area where there is high rate of unemployment and poverty. The community here is dependent on the Government grants as well as the NGOs. The distance that some learners have to travel between the school and home is about 3 km.

There are 1 800 learners as well as 560 staff members. Many learners come to school hungry, without shoes and not properly dressed in school uniform. There is a high failure rate of learners as they do not get enough support from parents. Teachers need the support of parents on the following:

- Deciding on Curriculum and language policy.
- Discussing academic progress.
- Taking crucial decisions.
- Nutrition of learners.
- School activities.

Ntemoseng Senior Secondary School

Ntemoseng Senior Secondary School is in the Free State province in Botshabelo. Botshabelo was once a part of homeland system (QwaQwa). The area has employed and unemployed people so are the parents of learners. Some learners are having parents while others are orphans who are living with guardians, very few are living on their own. The school has grades 8 to 12 with the current enrolment of 384 learners, 26 teachers and 9 support staff.

The school involve parents in its activities such as general parents meetings, fund raising, and learners' progress report meetings. Before the project started only few parents and guardians attended these meetings and as such the school was unable to ensure best performance of learners without the support of the parents / guardians. The school invited parents / guardian to meetings through invitation which were given to learners, who were expected to give them to their parents.

The school has National School Nutrition Programme, free Learning and Teaching Support Material and it is a non-fee paying school. This shows that the government is fully committed to provision and protection.

The school has the School Governing Body which was elected by the stakeholders, the Representative Council of Learners which was elected by the learners. Two learners are part of the School Governing Body. This also shows the government's commitment to ensure participation of stakeholders, i.e. learners taking part in decision making in the School Governing Body.

The school was established in 1984. It went through changes from high performing school to non-performing school. The current situation is that the school is changing towards a performing school looking at the results from 2011 to 2012.

The school will therefore be a performing school if all parents / guardians could be involved in the learning of their children.



Parents meeting discussing childrens' rights at Ntemoseng High

Purpose

To improve parental involvement and their cooperation for conducive learning and teaching environment as outlined in the CRC.

Target Group and Stakeholders

Even though our focus targets were parents, we are also working with learners, educators and other stakeholder's such as:

- School Based Support Teams
- Group 4 security
- Amalgamated Bank of South Africa
- PEP store
- Woolworths
- Food and trees for Africa

Activities and Results

Information about the project

After our visit to Sweden a meeting was secured with the Director of the District and the District management team, educators, School Governing Bodies, School Management Teams and Representative Council of Learners to:

- Give feedback on the project.
- Seek support from all stakeholders.
- Table the project plan.

Solicit permission to pilot the project in the two schools.

Result

The project was accepted by everyone and they pledged their support.

Training and Information about CRC to Parents, Learners and Educators

A workshop was conducted in each of the two schools whereby 87 educators, 20 RCL learners, 20 Grades representatives and 22 SGB members were trained on child rights.

300 Parents were trained on Win-Win Parenting which is a departmental programme that equips parents with skills on how to treat and win their children; this training was done in partnership with the Department of Social Welfare.

- 25 parents at Matla Primary were trained on a 2 weeks program called New Start; which is a programme that develops parents on ways of dealing with children who have moral, behavioural and sexuality problems.

Result

- Learners are not only aware of their rights but also their responsibilities and the effects that come with parents who are not supportive. They display their understanding of their rights through role plays and talking and making parents aware of their rights and asking for their parents' support.
- Parents who attended New Start programme were awarded certificates and are now regarded as Ambassadors who garner support for the school from other parents and also market the school.
- Matla School went further by approaching Department of Health to sponsor them with raincoats for learners who absent themselves from school when it rains.
- Parents have volunteered to clean the learner's classrooms so that they can learn in a clean child friendly school.
- There are effective vegetable gardens in both schools that feed needy learners.

These gardens are taken care of by parents from the school. They were sponsored by Woolworth, Edu Trust and Amalgamated Bank of South Africa. There are 4 parents who are assisting with the garden at Ntemoseng, Matla had just one parent assisting in the garden but after a meeting with Matla parents the number was increased to 9. The reason for Ntemoseng to stick to 4 parents is mainly for control purposes but in future they will increase the number after getting more gardens where learners will also be taking part. The school is also benefiting financially on the food garden by selling the vegetables to the supplier that supply vegetables for the school. The garden also contributes to feeding grade 12 learners in the camps.



Vegetable garden at MatlaPrimary.



Learners at Matla starting a vegetable garden

- Girls are provided with sanitary pads donated to the school by the Department of Health and Social Development
- Group 4 inmates have contributed learning and library material at Matla School

New ways of inviting parents

- The schools came up with new ways of inviting parents whereby invitation letters were written to parents, they were expected to sign a form as an acknowledgement of receipt of the invitation. Other than that they were sent sms's on their cellphones and driving around in a car with a loud hailer reminding them about the meeting.

Result

- Parents turned out in numbers to meeting because they are impressed and happy about the work done by educators.
- Parents are now voluntarily training school majorettes which performs for parents during parents meetings.
- Meeting programmes for the quarter were issued out on time to make them aware well in advance about the meeting.
- Learners were able to accompany their parents to meetings and sit one on one with their educators this has strengthened parent- learners and teacher relationship in the two schools.
- Schools introduced Home work meetings where learners' problems were discussed and addressed at an early stage.

- Parents volunteered to supervise learners during evening studies at Ntemoseng and they rotate by taking turns from Monday- Thursday
- Learners sit with their parents when they are given feedback on their academic performance and in that meeting the Head of Department explain to parents on how to assist their children with their school work.
- Learner's behavior and performance has improved and learners are able to express themselves with confidence.
- Educators are no longer focusing on disciplining the learners but they are curriculum – oriented (Ntemoseng).

Parents took the initiative in Matla School to form part of Community Policing Forum that patrols the school every night to protect the school property as well as the building material used for building the school hall.

Measures to strengthen children's participation

20 representatives Council of Learners were trained on Child Rights with more emphasis on parental involvement and Constitutional values and 6 learners were trained as change agents of Ntemoseng High School. These learners are assisting the school and the RCL with the promotion of child rights whereby prior to parents meetings they moved around classes to encourage and motivate other learners to encourage their parents to attend meetings.



Recognising excellence at Ntemoseng High School.

- Matla Primary has started with Grades representatives who are forming Matla Primary School Council headed by 2 teachers in the school. This is a way of developing and equipping them with leadership skills and to strengthen their participation in decision-making.

Result

- Change agents at Ntemoseng are actively involved in promoting the Rights of learners they can even role play the rights and responsibilities

Matla Primary School Council is fully functional and they are assisting the school with maintain order, helping needy learners and making them aware of their rights. These learners are assisted by Mr. Mafoyane and Ms Hlalele. They also address parents during parents meetings about their rights.

National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP)

Both schools have NSNP; this is a programme that was initiated by the Department of Basic Education to feed learners. In the past the service providers will bid for the tender and the winning service provider will appoint people who will feed the learners according to the prescripts of the NSNP irrespective whether the parent had a child in that school or not but after the CRC in Sweden things have changed in both schools

preference is given to parents whose learners are attending at the particular school to feed learners and they are also given an opportunity to supply food to the schools.

Result

There are 8 parents from Matla and 4 from Ntemoseng who are cooking and feeding learners.

Cooperation with Sponsors

The project does not only focus on parental involvement but both schools are also securing sponsors to assist them in ensuring that parental Involvement and learner performance is improved in both schools. The following sponsors were secured:

Woolworths Trust (**Vegetable garden**)

Food and Trees for Africa (**Trees**)

Amalgamated Banks of South Africa (**Vegetable gardens and seeds**)

Pep Academy (**Academic Intervention Strategy**)

Group 4 (**Library material, desks and cleaning of school**)

South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) **donate school uniform to needy learners**

South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) **donated shoes**

University of Free State (UFS) (**Academic Intervention strategy**)



Pep academy sponsoring learners for good school attendance

Discussion and Reflections

The programme on Child Rights Convention has achieved its initial objectives of parental involvement, child rights awareness to all stakeholders, learners' performance and the integration of child rights in school curriculum and school policies through participation, provision and protection. (3 P's) To mention a few such as:

- Improved Learners' Participation and Performance
- Strengthened family relation
- Well attended meetings
- Voluntary parents' participation.



The Principal of Matla Primary reinforcing Child Rights

It must be noted that even though the project has achieved its objectives there are still some of the parents who are still not eager to be involved in school activities thus affect their involvement/ participation as well as learners performance in the school.

It was also not an easy task to perform both at a personal, professional and organizational level.

Personal Level

CRC has broadened our skills, knowledge, attitude and experience. The project changed us as change agents through contact sessions with our facilitators as well as other change

agents during our visit in Lund University and Ho Chi Mi City in Vietnam as well as the interaction we had with our mentor Bodil Rasmusson who took time to understand each one of us.

As change agents we had to understand one another, and realize the strengths that each change agent had, and support each others' weaknesses. We realized that even though our group was so diverse we had only one thing in mind that is TEAM work and that we are a FAMILY.

Professional Level

It is always not easy to work with other people especially when you are used to your own space. It will not always be easy to introduce a new concept on people who do not have the same experience, knowledge, values and understanding that one had, but as Change Agents we supported each other, trusted and realized each others' strengths in report writing, interactions and presenting the change project to our target groups.

Despite the obstacles we faced as a team, the project continued because of the trust we had on each other. We furthermore learned that if we have trust amongst ourselves even though we are working in different workstations we should communicate in whatever way. However we have learned that together we can do and achieve more through unity and team work.

Way Forward

After deliberations with our target groups as well as our sponsors we agreed on the following:

- Broaden the project to neighbouring schools and train other change agents who will assist us roll out of the project to other schools.
- Regular feedback to the MEC and authorities on the project.
- Strengthen the network with other change agents both internationally and locally.
- Have quarterly feedback meetings with parents and other stakeholders to discuss progress.
- Strengthen parent-learner-teacher relationships.
- Hold meetings with professional working groups.
- Continue to strengthen children's participation in the two schools.
- A monitoring tool has been developed to monitor the progress in the two schools.