

[Questions and Answers Session with Speakers]

Waraiporn Sangnapaboworn (Head of International Education Section, Office of National Education Commission, Thailand)

Let me briefly summarize the information that we have been given so far. Professor Fry gave us his philosophy on why decentralization of power in educational administration is necessary. He emphasized equity, with particular concern for the relatively poorer Northeastern part of Thailand, urging the Thai government to give more empowerment to local community and schools.

I presented the micro-level case studies of work in the Udonthani Province, which showed that school and local community collaboration is possible if they understand and help each other well, and if their implementation efforts are centered on the quality of education, that is, the benefit of students.

Professor Govinda told us why India promotes community participation, suggesting the things that the community can do for improving the school, ranging from infrastructure development to enrolment and mobilization of resources, but not academic improvement. In acknowledging that community involvement can contribute to more effective functioning of schools, he pointed out that it is not easy to change the power structure; everyone must be involved - from the political leadership and the bureaucracy to schools and parents. With India being famous for its democracy, he proposes that we can sustain or improve the school-community collaboration through the democratic process.

Mr. Issa gave us experiences of educational development through community participation in Niger. He told us about school management committees (SMC/COGES) supported by the JICA EFA project, which were successfully implemented because they used the democratic process. He gave examples of school action plan initiatives and activities; the results of which were very satisfactory. We were very pleased to see the increase in the enrolment of girls and the improvement of exam results that resulted from these SMC projects. He concluded that communities could be leading actors if the community organization itself functions properly.

Professor Mizumoto demonstrated Japan's experiences in good practice of school-community collaboration. From both sides there was exchange, help and assistance in various ways. Due to social changes in recent years he suggested that there was also the need for a paradigm shift in school and community collaboration. Specifically, collaboration should be centered on the children's growth.

Altogether I found that decentralization of power in educational administration from the central bureau to schools and the local community has taken place in every part of the world; ranging from Thailand to India, Niger and, as we heard this morning, Mali.

At the school level we call it the Site Based or School Based Management (SBM) System, where there is an organization called the School Council, School Management Committee or other names. These organizations function very well in linking communities with schools to work for the benefit of students, teachers and the community as a whole. The SMC is comprised of various stakeholders including parents, teachers and the community. The level of contribution to education from this type of community participation can be very high and take many forms.

Japan has various types of communication between schools and the community. Through collaboration, they mobilize resources and support school lunch programmes. The community can help to improve facilities, enrolment, teaching, school performance, health and monitoring. In addition it can function as a social watch and work for school safety.

In India, Niger, Thailand and Japan the results of the collaboration were seen first in students. Students' access increased, there was a better quality of education and parents had a voice in school policy. Through the work of the school committees the school and teachers felt more accountable to the community and are functioning more effectively.

Yet, India showed a lot of concern or apprehension about emerging issues of whether the power will be concentrated in the school and bring another problem at this level. Also, the differing backgrounds of stakeholders at the school level may give rise to another issue.

We found some other key factors for success such as democracy. This can be used to solve some problems, as was the case in Niger, where after the election the committees were better recognized. Another key factor is capacity building. If the school management committee isn't functioning well, it is a matter of training, so that members will realize their roles and participate more effectively.

At this time, then, we will open the floor for question or comments.

Question 1: Abdul Rashid (Visiting Professor, CICE, Hiroshima University)

I would first like to talk about the policies. In Malaysia we have more policies than we know what to do with. Policies keep on changing, but the old ones are not being done away with. In secondary schools there is much of what has been mentioned here. We have the PTA, Sports Day, Parent's Day, Fundraising, etc. At least on the surface, it appears to be very communicative. Many schools do this as a matter of fact or because of orders from higher up or because it is trendy. The school's principal can be seen to be doing something novel. It is nice to invite senior citizens in to reminisce or to have athletes showing their prowess, but at the end of the day community involvement should first be about benefitting the children, before benefiting the community. We should be bringing in the community if it benefits the children, not just for the sake of doing it. Within this context, research shows that the most effective schools are those that have the most effective principals. My questions therefore are:

What and whose purposes are we serving?

Who is at the centre of the issue, the principal, the teachers or the community?

Where are we taking education to with community involvement?

Are we trying to solve old problems in new ways or new problems in old ways? Thank you.

Waraiporn Sangnapaboworn (Head of International Education Section, Office of National Education Commission, Thailand)

I agree that we should do these collaborations for the benefit of the learners, not for ourselves. We should put students at the centre of collaboration.

Gerald W. Fry (Professor, College of Education and Human Development, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, University of Minnesota, USA)

Just one point about that. We talked a lot about stakeholders, and this is a good question. I think it was in Niger where, as part of the school committee, they had representatives of students. I remember in Thailand where there was a forum organized, I believe by the Ministry of Education, at which children articulated their ideas about education. So I think that maybe, as this is a very innovative forum, we might want to think more, at every level of education, about the extent to which the voices of the children should be heard.

R. Govinda (Vice-Chancellor, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, India)

I think we should avoid treading on the role of the headmaster. As Professor Rashid said, the principal has a very important role to play in the process. Sometimes we are overly enthusiastic with community participation and we subject the principal to the control of the community, resulting in the erosion of his/her autonomy, which is not good.

Secondly, success will come if there is trust between the school staff on one hand and the community on the other.

It will not happen if we simply create and thrust community management at the principal. If the school has no trust in the community and regard them as only creating unnecessary interference, then the process will not work. One local [Indian] parliamentarian commented of the education committees that these would become the “Village Interference Committees”. It is important to recognize this and create balance between the two sides.

Waraiporn Sangnapaboworn (Head of International Education Section, Office of National Education Commission, Thailand)

From my own experience, I agree with Professor Rashid that effective principals are very important in starting the process of collaboration. In my pilot project, those principals who had very effective leadership were those who had instructional leadership; they would think about teaching and learning before any other administrative matters. They were the ones who invited community people to participate in the school. Theirs was a very important role.

Question 2: Maria Teresa Félix (Cultural Attaché, Embassy of Angola)

I am lucky to have found the answers to my questions spread out over all the presentations. However, I still have one issue: We have to be results-oriented and communities are not in charge of planning. So what is the connection between these ideas for having the communities participating in the education of their children and fact that it is really the government that decides the direction of the education system?

We heard of one Japanese experience from Professor Kaneko, in which the educational objectives are shared with the volunteers. We didn't discuss the real skills of these volunteers. My concern, then, is that the cost of education may be underestimated because the volunteers' time, which also has value, does not seem to be taken into account anywhere.

How can we make sure that community participation helps education to meet the future economic and social development objectives of our children?

R. Govinda (Vice-Chancellor, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, India)

Community participation will not solve all the problems of a country. However, I firmly believe that we should break the alienation that exists in many countries between the government, the school and the community. The community very often thinks that it [education] is someone else's job. This, I think is the fundamental reason for bringing the schools and communities together. It can, as in the case of Japan, contribute to the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. But in most other countries it will at least contribute to improving the functional efficiency of the schools; bringing and retaining more children in school and maintaining facilities for a better learning environment. I believe in this more modest expectation of education, rather than that all the problems will be solved.

Ibo Issa (National Coordinator, ONEN(Organisation Nigérienne des Educateurs Novateurs), Niger Principal Coordinator, JICA School For All Project)

In terms of the community's participation, I think it is important to put things in perspective. Some schools are sometimes abandoned: inspectors don't go, so no one knows if teachers are actually there. In these cases, the only ones who can ensure that the teachers are at school are the local people.

Now as to what communities can bring to schools, we shouldn't forget that communities can do things that states cannot. You can have billions of dollars and the best-trained teachers, but if a mother thinks that it is better to keep her daughter at home for other purposes and you have no children in the schools, then it is meaningless. So what is important is to bring in the community to ensure that children go to school. It is a misconception to think of education as only a matter of money. The state has money, but there are things that only the community can do. For example in Niger,

if the teacher does not come for 10 days, it's up to the community to find out what has happened. The local community should show ownership of the schools.

If there are no schools, then there will be no basic development. We have to make sure that schools become useful for the community and in our own way, not in the way that has been colonially inherited. The idea then is that if you bring children to school it is not because you have to, but that it is because it is good for you. You have to be open and frank with the community. Education is a right in any religion or community. It's not just in terms of money. We have seen so many projects by the World Bank, but that's not enough. We need to change things and do them in our own way.

Gerald W. Fry (Professor, College of Education and Human Development, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, University of Minnesota, USA)

I shared with you a quotation from Somsak in *The Kingdom of Thailand* and he emphasized so much dialogue. To me the really important aspect of school/community relations is providing a forum for creative dialogue, free from constraints and from hierarchy. And then in each community - we saw the great diversity in India, the great diversity in Indonesia, considerable diversity in Thailand - the outcomes will vary. The Ministry of Education cannot define a single outcome. The needs are so different, so out of this creative dialogue among the stakeholders at the local level, I hope that we can have education that really meets the needs; and if it meets the needs then the children will come to school.

Noriaki Mizumoto (Associate Professor, College of Education, School of Human Sciences, University of Tsukuba)

With regard to who determines the objectives of education, in the discussion today, we are talking about the centralized [system] versus the decentralized; how we can delegate the authority. The context was whether the central government or the local community should determine the objectives. However, I think there is another context. Should the objectives of education really be determined only by the education sector – the Ministry of Education, the Board of Education and the school? The education sector was traditionally the only player related to making decisions about education, but I think community also encompasses other sectors and other factors. So I think we should eliminate the barriers between the education and non-education sectors. This is another perspective in this discussion.

Waraiporn Sangnapaboworn (Head of International Education Section, Office of National Education Commission, Thailand)

In my presentation we saw that educational volunteers in the community set up their own indicators for deciding the characteristics of students, who are their own children, in the community. This is a part of the role of local people who can initiate their own ideas of what they want their children to be like, of course within the framework of the law and National Education Act. It is not different from the government's initiative. We would see the same initiatives, ideas and policies from the state level to the school level, if we concentrate on children's benefits.

Question 3: Benson Banda (Student, Hiroshima University)

From the perspective of cultural dynamics within communities, pilot interventions tend to be successful, due to focused intervention or attention. How can we ensure that the roll out of SMCs can survive beyond the pilot stage? It may not be only SMCs, but most interventions seem to suffer even when they have been very successful in the pilot phase. So I feel we need to go beyond that and think about what we can do to sustain them.

Question 4: Elizabeth Nkoma (Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Zimbabwe)

Looking at the results in Japan I feel that community approach could produce fruits in developing countries.

However, in developing countries like most African countries the first thing that has to be addressed in Africa is the training of teachers themselves, before we go to the community. Another problem in developing countries is that the communities don't even know the value of the education of their children, possibly because they themselves are uneducated. I therefore believe that we should start from the ground up, so that the aims of community participation can be achieved.

Question 5: Bihina Philomine (Ministry of Basic Education, Cameroon)

Thank you. My question is to Professor Govinda. India is known to be a country with multiple cultural traditions, so I would like to know how community collaboration is actually managed in a multicultural context.

Gerald W. Fry (Professor, College of Education and Human Development, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development, University of Minnesota, USA)

The sustainability of interventions may be one of the most complex problems in education development assistance. We find many cases where the projects are not sustainable. Once the World Bank or Asian Development Bank leaves, the money dries up and it's very hard to sustain the intervention.

I think the answer may be that when we design the pilot interventions we need to make sure that these projects are not special, that they can work even if JICA/WB is absent. I think that improves the probability that they will be sustainable.

Waraiporn Sangnapaboworn (Head of International Education Section, Office of National Education Commission, Thailand)

In addition to that, in order to sustain the development we must ensure that the innovation is assimilated into daily activity and adds value to what the community is doing. I think that having a group of leaders who understand and can continue the development would also be helpful. It is important to find some persons who understand the project and will champion its continuity.

R. Govinda (Vice-Chancellor, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, India)

Another important point is that in societies with multiple hierarchies creating a 'one community' feeling among them is itself a big project. We have to recognize that in many of our societies, we are divided on ethnic and language considerations. So a very important requirement, as the moderator has already said, is to find local champions, rather than bringing in outside experts to try to create this. Outside experts are not likely to achieve this because when they disappear, so will any initiatives that they support.

Second, the process that we adopt should be simple enough and endogenously generated, not from outside. Don't make it sophisticated, so that it will work only as long as the experts are there.

A third very important point for sustainability in community participation is that you have to hold it long enough. Very often the projects come and the organizers think that they will achieve everything in 3 years and the situation is likely to change. This is not the case. Societies have their own rhythms and cycles of change. So holding the project long enough is more likely to ensure success.

I would also like to say that even in communities where the population is less educated we need to have faith in the basic democratic concerns of the people. I think that if we don't have faith in basic democracy, community participation is not likely to work. We should have faith that the parents are concerned with the education of their children and while they will make mistakes it is better that the mistakes are made by them and not by the state.

On the last point regarding managing in a multiple tradition situation, it is a very tough job that we in India have. We have consciously developed every school as a secular public space, so that the concerns of a particular culture, religion or language should not interfere there. That is the way we are trying to develop. I will not say that we have had one hundred percent success, but over time perhaps we will achieve this.

Ibo Issa (National Coordinator, ONEN(Organisation Nigérienne des Educateurs Novateurs), Niger Principal Coordinator, JICA School For All Project)

I would like to mention about pilot sustainability. In Niger, we are not in the phase of experimentation, but implementation. In the beginning with JICA the community did not like the project, being used to working with other models from entities such as UNICEF. We wanted to change things, to share experiences and see how the communities could organize themselves. The JICA approach was different in that we decided to do training, but not talk about money. Money means training with public servants and implementation comes after this; then one speaks of follow-up and money becoming necessary in terms of needing transportation for the ones doing the monitoring to access the villages. This will not work and will not be sustainable. However if you do it with the community, you have to do it in the field. With the community approach, from the very beginning at the general assembly of the COGES (*Comités de gestion des établissements scolaires*) everybody decides what and who will be sent and what money will be needed. Everything is decided from the grassroots level. We now have approximately twelve thousand action plans and we didn't need money for that. This was achieved because each community was doing it. If you do it on the field, in each village, then it's possible.

In Niger, there are inspectors who meet the committees to see where things are. This means sustainability is integrated into the everyday activities that have already been decided and adopted by the general assembly. Of course in the beginning it is not easy because one has to change mentalities and the old way of doing things, but if one is really persistent and if one really wants to go in this way, then it works and we have seen some changes in Niger.

Noriaki Mizumoto (Associate Professor, College of Education, School of Human Sciences, University of Tsukuba)

I think there was a question about the difference between Japan and developing countries. In Japan in the Meiji era when the school was established, the community took the lead, organized the school and hired teachers. One important thing was that there was a leader at the community level and at the same time, teachers themselves became the leaders of the community. The competence of teachers is also important. In the case of Japan there is inter-school training, which is more focused on the research of teachers. This means that there is a system that allows the teachers themselves to learn. This also goes back to the Meiji era when, for example, some teachers would visit the neighboring schools to see what they were doing. This kind of training would not require any budget and hence is a self-help type of education that enhances the teaching level of such schoolteachers.

Waraiporn Sangnapaboworn (Head of International Education Section, Office of National Education Commission, Thailand)

I think it is also important to identify best practices on the community. For example in the Surplur District model that I introduced, we encourage our communities to take the initiative in collaborating with each other, that is, producing ideas and best practices from the bottom up. If we can identify them we will ensure that they are doing it correctly and we will share the best practices with other parts of the country.

Shinji Ishii (Chairman, Hiroshima City Board of Education)

The discussion on community participation, centralization or decentralization, and the relationship between the two is something very close to me, because I myself am faced with such issues. As Professor Mizumoto mentioned we have more moderate centralization. While keeping this in mind though, education historically has had more to do with the home and community level and at the same time the school. Those three parties were responsible for education because in order to nurture its successors the community had to provide the education. However the society structure in Japan has changed and many people who have grown up and received their education from the rural communities are now leaving their hometowns for Tokyo and other metropolitan areas. Therefore some people started to say that it was better to transfer this responsibility to the prefectural level and as such Japan is now facing the weakening of educational power at the community level. In the last decade or so, the committee from the central government started to promote co-work, not necessarily collaboration, which means that the community level would have to be engaged more; otherwise education would not work. This means opening up the schools, for instance by utilizing the internet to create their schools HP and send out the message about what is being done in the schools and soliciting the opinion of the various stake holders involved about the education provided in schools. The results, as Professor Mizumoto mentioned, are not only schools volunteer programmes, but also assistance in commuting to and from school.

Therefore in one area there is a lot of progress, but the major issue that we are facing is two-fold. First and foremost there are some people who wish to help, but whose help we do not necessarily want. These people are very vocal about what to do and what not to do, to the extent that parents are pointing fingers at the teachers to quit school because the teachers are not performing well enough. Those people do not have the assessment capability or power, yet are intruding very much into school management. Therefore in some cases it is better that the community does not help us; and that's one problem that we're facing.

The second issue is that the people in the community sometimes become too egocentric and I think this is something that is lingering from the long past of Japan. However, I am hoping that these community people would be able to feel the joy of becoming a part of formulating education; meaning that I want these people to see the bigger perspective that they are helping out the future of Japan. Therefore sometimes, if you think the needs of the community have to be met, then education as a whole is not going to work well. That is the perspective that I have.

Waraiorn Sangnapaboworn (Head of International Education Section, Office of National Education Commission, Thailand)

Professor Ishii has told us of another aspect of the Japanese system in which the community becomes egoistic, and this is something we have not heard before.

R. Govinda (Vice-Chancellor, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, India)

I also think that it is very important to avoid the de-professionalization of school management. School management should be done by people who understand the school. The school has a very important and unique role to play and every community member may not fully understand role of the teacher or the kind of curriculum that has to be used. Too much interference by the community can be disruptive to all these processes.

Waraiorn Sangnapaboworn (Head of International Education Section, Office of National Education Commission, Thailand)

Yes, look for people on whom you can lean against, who are with the school. That's a good idea.

Noriaki Mizumoto (Associate Professor, College of Education, School of Human Sciences, University of Tsukuba)

We have to make the right selection of committee participants from the community. When we talk about community school, I believe that it is the community *per se* that is learning and the community school is for the service of the community. In this process of learning the residents and the schools enhance their ideas of what it takes to serve the needs of the community. In other words, there are some needs that must be served in the community, and the issue is not whether to serve them or not, but rather the issue is that we have to ensure that the community is able to learn sufficiently.

Waraiporn Sangnapaboworn (Head of International Education Section, Office of National Education Commission, Thailand)

I agree with you, Professor Ishii, which we should look for a moderate kind of decentralization or centralization. We have to make sure that the community is ready and prepared for self-management and that the state understands the meaning of decentralization. I am, however, worried about Japan's tendency to re-centralize the power to the prefecture or ministry because of rural-urban migration because Thailand has been following in Japan's footsteps in terms of decentralization. We are trying to transfer the power of administration from the ministry to TAOs or district administrative organizations so that local people will take care of education, but we now have problems of conflict between the Ministries of the Interior and of Education. Through Japan's experiences I have learned that we should be neither too centralized nor decentralized, but is very difficult figure out how to strike a good balance.

Ibo Issa (National Coordinator, ONEN(Organisation Nigérienne des Educateurs Novateurs), Niger Principal Coordinator, JICA School For All Project)

I want to make a comment on the choices made by the community and those made by the government. I don't think that they are mutually exclusive. Of course the training of teachers is one thing and the training of the community is another, but we can and have to do both at the same time. Further, I don't think that one can be done without the other. One can train teachers and train the community or try to have more awareness of the community. I believe they are complementary.

Waraiporn Sangnapaboworn (Head of International Education Section, Office of National Education Commission, Thailand)

Thanks to our panelists for their comments and responses. With that I think we have clarified the remaining questions.