A review of Clusters of Schools in Namibia

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BEP	Basic Education Project
BES II Project	Basic Education Support Project, phase 2
BETD	Basic Education Teachers' Diploma
CS	Combined school, offering some primary and secondary grades
EDS	Educator Development and Support
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HOD	Head of Department
IECD	Institute for Educational Career Development
JP	Junior Primary School (Grades 1 to 4)
JS	Junior Secondary School (Grades 8 to 10)
KfW	Kredietanstalt für Wiederaufbau
MASTEP	Mathematics and Science teachers Education Programme
MBESC	Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture
NAMAS	Namibia Association of Norway
NIED	National Institute for Education Development
PS	Primary School (Grades 1 to 5, 6 or 7)
REO	Regional Education Office
SRC	Students' Representative Council
SS	Secondary School (Grades 8 to 12)
TRC	Teachers' Resource Centre

SUMMARY

The report provides a review of the development and functioning of clusters of schools in Namibia. Each cluster consists of a group of schools that are geographically as close and accessible to each other as possible. One of the schools is appointed as the cluster centre with the expectation that the centre school and its principal perform various roles of co-ordination and leadership within the cluster.

Clusters for all schools were first created in the Rundu Education Region. This was in 1997, and was followed by the formation of clusters in 1999 and 2000 in Katima Mulilo, Khorixas and Keetmanshoop regions. A baseline study for each region provided the initial recommendations on the grouping of schools into clusters, selecting cluster centres, and grouping clusters into circuits. Project co-ordinators were appointed in Rundu, Katima Mulilo, Khorixas and Keetmanshoop regions. Clusters were planned for all schools in Ondangwa East and Ondangwa West during 2001, and they will be established in the Windhoek region early in 2002.

A total of 238 clusters covering 1,383 schools had been established by the end of 2001. The average number of schools per cluster is 5.8, with the great majority of clusters consisting of between 4 and 8 schools. Clusters were grouped into inspection circuits, with an average of 5.7 clusters per circuit.

The cluster system was initiated to improve access and the flow of learners through the school grades. The functional emphasis of clusters then changed, with more attention being placed on the use of clusters to improve school management, especially by enhancing communication between schools, and then on to circuit offices and regional offices. More recently, many activities in clusters have turned to improving the quality of teaching.

A key finding of the review is the fact that the cluster system now operates with a high degree of variation. That variation holds between regions, circuits and clusters, so that the system works more effectively in certain regions, circuits and clusters than in others.

Another important finding is the very great variety of applications and functions of clusters, so that some functions are applied in certain clusters while different applications are emphasized in other clusters. The most significant functions found during this review concern the following:

Management applications. Cluster centre principals play various roles in assisting, supervising and managing the satellite schools in their clusters. Cluster management committees, comprising all principals in a cluster, make joint decisions and recommendations to improve the management of education at their schools. These local level solutions are found speedily and are more readily embraced than the delayed responses that come from higher levels in a regional or head office. Demands on regional offices have been reduced where authorities and responsibilities have been delegated to circuit and cluster levels. This has allowed staff in regional offices to spend time on other core functions. Absenteeism among teachers and learners has been reduced as a result of better management through the clusters.

Efficiency. The distribution of materials and collection of information has been made more efficient by channelling these activities through the cluster centres. Transport costs and time spent on these tasks has been reduced. Clusters provide a framework to allow for more efficient use of resources. For example, teachers are transferred within clusters to schools where they are better needed, grades are eliminated when enrolments are low and the same grades are offered nearby, and physical facilities are developed at points where they will be used most effectively within clusters.

Learning and teaching. Many clusters have developed committees or subject groups to discuss and share issues concerning examinations, standards, and schemes of work. This has resulted in the sharing of examination papers, thus saving the need (and time) for each teacher to formulate separate examination papers. Of greater benefit are the common understandings that have been developed among teachers of what must be taught and examined. Standards have been raised in many schools where that kind of understanding has been inadequate and where teachers have been involved in cluster-based subject groups

Other general benefits. Clusters have created the important opportunity of bringing teachers, principals and school board members together. This has seldom happened before. Schools and teachers that were previously isolated have now been included into goal-oriented committees dealing with management and didactic issues. Relations between principals and teachers and parents have improved, and a culture of sharing, openness and mutual support has developed in many clusters. Management and other skills are upgraded where people are delegated tasks normally done by more senior staff. Most importantly, the sharing of ideas and experiences in groups of people brought together through the clusters has

resulted in innovative solutions being found to deal with problems. Many clusters have organised sports and cultural events between neighbouring clusters.

This review found that a number of factors have led to the success of the cluster system. The factors differ from region to region, circuit to circuit, and cluster to cluster, and this is why there is such a high degree of variation in the performance of the system. Foremost of the factors leading to success is strong support from the Regional Education Office, from inspectors and by the Basic Education Project. The delegation of responsibilities to clusters by the Regional Education Office has empowered clusters, opening the way for them to tackle a variety of issues, especially those concerned with the management of education. An open-mindedness to try the new system has been important. Clusters that have been most active are those headed by competent and committed cluster centre principals. Schools that are most involved and that have benefited most from cluster activities tended to be those with the greatest needs, while larger, urban schools have seen fewer reasons to support the system. Reasonable access between schools has made it easier for people to meet, while the availability of telephone and fax facilities has been valuable in enabling cluster activities to be arranged. A final factor leading to success is that many schools have seen the benefits of clusters which, in turn, have then led the schools to make good use of the system. This means that many applications have been driven by local-level demands rather than being imposed from outside.

Several factors were also found to have been responsible for clusters not being implemented actively. Most of these are the exact opposite to the circumstances that promoted the cluster system. Thus, the development of clusters in some areas has been limited by inadequate support from outside, poor access between schools and the absence of communication facilities, as well as uncommitted cluster centre principals and inspectors. Workloads of cluster centre principals have increased, but this has not been perceived as a problem where the outcomes have been rewarding. Some principals expect to receive additional compensation for their work at the cluster centres.

For the future, it is strongly recommended that the cluster system be sustained and further developed in Namibia. The system has the potential to break the isolation of teachers especially in small, remote schools, while improving education standards. Steps should be taken to formalise and institutionalise the system so that clusters should become effective units to manage education. This will be especially important as the education system is decentralized to the 13 political regions. The opportunity of decentralization should be taken further to a second lower level, by delegating authority and responsibility to circuits and

clusters. The involvement of Regional Councillors in these lower and local level structures will be valuable.

Clusters also offer the Ministry the good opportunity of adjusting learner:teacher ratios on the basis of whole groups of schools rather than for each individual school.

Advisory teachers should channel their work to the subject groups in clusters, given the strong demands among teachers to co-ordinate and share inputs to examinations, schemes of work and their interpretations of syllabi. Advisory teachers should also be based in the same offices as inspectors, and teacher resource centres or educator development services should be located in the same offices. This will create local district education offices from where services can readily be delivered to clusters and their satellite schools.

There is a continued need for support to the system. This should be in the form of facilities, equipment and materials for cluster centres. Support should also be given to the use of clusters for purposes of planning. The most important support, however, will be moral and organisational assistance to strengthen the system and to ensure that it produces the best benefits.

It is recommended that clusters be formalized by organising clusters into functional schooling units (FSU's) to create fixed management linkages between the schools. Each cluster would become a FSU and would consist of a given number of teachers, perhaps 30 to 50 teachers. The different schools in a cluster would become satellite campuses, all managed by a senior principal and team of deputy principals and/or heads of departments. Existing large schools could operate as autonomous FSU's since they have large numbers of teachers. The implementation of this system would meet the need for an appropriate salary to pay for the duties performed by the senior principal in each cluster or FSU, but it could also lead to a considerable reduction in the total salary budget of the Ministry.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This report reviews the development of clusters of schools: how they have been implemented, what benefits have arisen, and what constraints and problems are associated with clusters. Much of the report consists of a review of cluster functioning in each of the four regions where clusters have been developed with support from the Basic Education Project (BEP): Rundu, Katima Mulilo, Keetmanshoop and Khorixas. Information for each of these regions is presented in terms of:

- Management structures relevant to the cluster system in each region;
- The stages of the implementation process, including major inputs and interventions, such as logistical and professional inputs and support mechanisms;
- Benefits and innovations emerging from the application of the clusters;
- Constraints and concerns in each region;
- Recommendations for the next steps to further implement the system in each region.

The report then describes the status of the cluster system in the three education regions that have not yet implemented clusters. Actual and potential applications of the cluster system are then summarised and discussed, before final recommendations are made to suggest the way forward.

The investigation was undertaken by interviewing senior and circuit inspectors and selected cluster centre principals throughout the four regions. Interviews were also conducted with a variety of people at Head Office and the National Institute for Education Development (NIED), and at the Regional Education Offices (REO) of Katima Mulilo, Khorixas, Keetmanshoop and Rundu Education Regions.

What are school clusters?

The school cluster system requires the grouping schools into clusters, each normally consisting of between five and seven schools. One school in each group is selected to serve as the cluster centre. The cluster centre should have adequate facilities and should be as central and accessible as possible to the schools in the cluster, ideally at a development centre where other social and commercial services are available. The principal of the cluster centre should be a strong and competent manager, with a vision that can extend beyond his or her school to the needs of the cluster as a whole.

A number of management structures can or should support the cluster system. Firstly, clusters of schools are grouped into circuits under the management of a circuit inspector who provides overall support to the clusters. Circuit offices should be decentralised to be as close as possible to the clusters and schools that they serve. Within each circuit there may be a circuit management committee comprising the circuit inspector, the cluster centre principals and selected specialists such as advisory teachers. At the cluster level, there may be cluster management committees comprised of the cluster centre principal together with principals of the cluster or satellite schools, and selected senior teachers. These groupings enable information to flow between the different management levels, allowing issues to be dealt with and resolved close to where they occur, thus promoting greater efficiency and decentralised decision making. Good support for the cluster is system is therefore required from the REO, including the delegation of authority to circuit and cluster levels.

Development of the school cluster system in Namibia

The school cluster system has evolved over the past five years as a means of meeting the need for better education management at local levels. The Rundu region set the stage for this innovative means of managing education when it developed clusters of schools in 1996 and 1997. The BEP supported the initial development and structure of the system, but the Rundu REO took increasing ownership of

the system as its benefits became apparent. It should be noted that goal of the first phase of BEP was the development of better management and planning practices which could serve as models for other regions.

Benefits of the system in Rundu led three other regions (Katima Mulilo, Keetmanshoop and Khorixas) to request support from BEP to develop their own clusters. Baseline studies for these three regions were completed in 1999, the studies making recommendations on the schools to be grouped in each cluster and the grouping of clusters into circuits. The implementation phase of the cluster system in the Rundu, Katima Mulilo, Keetmanshoop and Khorixas regions was supported by BEP through the provision of regional advisors and other support staff, and material and training inputs. The cluster system also evolved in different ways in each region according to local needs, constraints and opportunities.

The initiation of clusters in Rundu was motivated at the time by the need to improve the flow of learners from one school phase to another. It then gradually shifted in emphasis, more into a way of improving the management of schools, especially by improving communication between schools within clusters, and between circuit offices and regional offices.

The Presidential Commission on Education and Training (1999) recommended that the system of clusters be expanded throughout the country and formalised. Steps to implement the cluster system in Ondangwa East and West were initiated in May 2000, and recommendations for clusters and circuits in these regions were finalised in July 2001. A similar study in the Windhoek Education Region will take place early in 2002.

Two somewhat different approaches were adopted during the baseline studies. The first was used in Rundu, Keetmanshoop, Khorixas and in part of Katima Mulilo. All schools were visited to assess their relationships with nearby schools, development needs and suitability as potential cluster centres. Draft recommendations were then tabled at consultative meetings of inspectors and senior regional management staff. Changes suggested at the meeting were incorporated into a set of final recommendations. The second approach, used in part of Katima Mulilo and in Ondangwa West and Ondangwa East, was more consultative. Individual schools were not visited, but several rounds of meetings with inspectors, regional management staff, regional councillors and other selected people were held to suggest clusters, cluster centres and circuits, and then to check and re-check those recommendations.

The need for school clusters

As will be made clear in this report, school clusters developed and evolved in response to various critical needs at a regional and school level. Those needs arose as a consequence of several factors that affect the way in which schools and regional offices work. Four of those factors are perhaps more important than others. The first factor is the low level of management and support given to schools. There are far too few inspectors, especially so in regions where schools have the greatest needs for support. Each inspector in those regions is responsible for 40 to 50 schools, compared to the 20 to 30 schools per inspector in regions where schools are much better organised, and where communication and access is much better. The variety of other demands placed on inspectors also means that they seldom have enough time to attend adequately to the management of their schools.

The second factor is the great need for teacher support. Huge efforts have been made to improve teachers' levels of training, to provide new curriculum materials, and to change teaching practices. However, most teachers get little support in helping them to prepare schemes of work, or improve their teaching methods, or interpret the curriculum so they know exactly what must be taught and examined. The MBESC Advisory Services are weak, with very few advisory teachers in place or actually visiting teachers to support them.

Thirdly, there is an obvious need for greater levels of participation by all stakeholders in making and implementing decisions. Despite the intention to improve levels of democratic participation and to decentralise the education system, little has been done to achieve those goals. Too many decisions have to be taken at a head or regional office level, leading to delays, frustrations, apathy and low-levels of ownership, accountability and responsibility. In essence, schools need more autonomy.

Finally, most schools work in relative isolation. Many schools are far from other schools or circuit offices, and inspectors seldom visit them. Supervision and management of the schools is generally poor, and there are few opportunities for teachers in different schools to meet and support each other. In some respects this is also because so many schools are relatively small, with the result that most teachers work in isolation and can not share ideas and experiences with colleagues offering the same subjects to the same grades.

It is these kinds of problems and needs that led the regions themselves to develop and improve the school cluster system. Indeed, many of the innovative benefits of clusters have been developed at an even lower level, within the clusters themselves and in the schools. The developments were therefore not initiated at a head office level, nor were they a direct response to any ministerial policy. Rather, they developed to solve problems within regions and, more importantly, as a way of improving the overall provision of education.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF CLUSTERS IN THE EDUCATION REGIONS:

RUNDU EDUCATION REGION

SUMMARY

School clusters were piloted in the Rundu region, and then implemented throughout the region in 1997. BEP played an active role in facilitating the implementation. However, progress has been impeded by security problems since 1999. Not all clusters are operating as they should. However, several cluster committees are active, especially the subject groups and examination committees. Teachers support each other in subject groups and compile common schemes of work. They are expected to meet syllabus deadlines which are determined by the subject groups. This enables their learners to write common examinations, which are set by examination committee members. Teachers who were previously isolated in small schools are now part of a larger support system. Principals now participate in decision-making in management committees. However, the Regional Education Office (REO) has not yet clearly delegated duties to clusters, and there is uncertainty as to how autonomous clusters really are. Functions such as education planning and advisory services are still centralised. Nonetheless, the efficiency of services has increased as many activities are now conducted through circuit offices and cluster centres. Deadlines for the collection of statistics are being met, and teaching materials are reaching remote schools. Several training initiatives have taken place in the region, including the training of school boards, which are now actively involved in school issues. With the recent improvements in security conditions, there is great scope for progress as many stakeholders are enthusiastic about the potential of the cluster system. The REO needs to be more committed to the implementation of the system, and inspectors need to motivate to have duties delegated down the line to the cluster management level. The re-establishment of a resident BEP co-ordinator's post in the region will greatly promote further progress, as the basic cluster system framework is already firmly in place here.

map

REGIONAL EDUCATION MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

Despite security problems in the region, efforts have been made by the BEP to remain active in the region by maintaining contact, by making material inputs and by involving inspectors and cluster centre principals in workshops inside and outside of the region. To ensure the ongoing implementation of the cluster system, organisational links were established between the REO and the BEP office in Windhoek. The Rundu Teachers' Resource Centre (TRC) manager now organises BEP activities and is a member of the regional project team, which remains active. Decentralised circuit offices throughout the region have been operational for some time, and several clusters are actively using the cluster system. The Regional Director, together with the regional management team, encourages cluster activities. The following management structures are in place in the region:

Circuit management board or committee: Although established on paper, these boards are not well entrenched in all circuits. Each group comprises the inspector and cluster centre principals. Meetings usually take place twice per term. The primary goals thus far have been to co-ordinate dates and activities of the examination board, to ensure the distribution of exam papers, circulars and materials through the circuit office, and to discuss problems, such as transport to meetings. Recommendations are made for improvements after the exam results are analysed. Principals' conferences and teachers' conferences are organised at circuit level, as are circuit competitions in sports and cultural activities.

Principals' board or cluster management committee: Principals meet with the cluster centre principal, normally at the cluster centre, usually once or twice per trimester. A range of problems are discussed and ideas are shared.

An examination board or committee for each circuit allows standards to be maintained. Examiners and moderators are identified within the circuits. In some circuits, teachers from one school set papers for the whole circuit while schools share this task in other circuits. Question papers are duplicated for the whole circuit, usually in Rundu. Marking takes place at individual schools and principals and HODs then moderate the papers. The REO takes responsibility for setting an August exam paper for Grade 10 learners. Question papers for Grades 5 to 9 are cluster-based or circuit-based.

Cluster subject meetings: Subject co-ordinators are members of the examination committee. They involve all subject teachers in subject meetings. Venues may be rotated to facilitate transport. Common schemes of work and interpretations of syllabi are discussed.

The cluster centre is used as a distribution point for circulars, textbooks and stationery. Statistical returns are checked and submitted by the cluster centre principal.

Each advisory committee is made up of the regional councillor, the inspector, school board chairmen and cluster centre principals from all schools in the circuit. The region's education forum has representatives from advisory committees as well as Namibia National Teachers' Association and the Regional Director. Political boundaries do not always coincide with circuit boundaries, so some schools fall outside of a constituency that includes other schools in the circuit.

STEPS TOWARDS ACTIVATION OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

Establishment of BEP in the Rundu region: The BEP has operated in the Rundu region since 1995 when a regional co-ordinator was appointed together with a small staff, based at the REO in Rundu. In December 1999, the deteriorating security situation in the region forced BEP staff to move to Windhoek. Upheavals in 2000 and early 2001, caused by the Angolan war spilling over into the Rundu region and increased crime, limited the progress the development of the cluster system.

Baseline studies: The first pilot study to investigate the viability of school clusters was done in the Rundu region in 1996. Then in 1997, cluster structures throughout the region were planned and the development needs of schools were assessed. In 1999, an assessment of development needs and the clustering of schools was completed for the Mukwe constituency after it was allocated to the Rundu region. BEP was active in the region during these studies, spearheading the development and implementation of the cluster system. There are now 50 clusters divided into 8 circuits in the whole region. Circuit borders were adjusted to distribute the workload more evenly amongst inspectors.

Assistance with establishment of circuit offices: Six new circuit offices had been built by 1999, with funding from Kredietanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW). The Rundu circuit office remained at the REO and the Mukwe circuit office is temporarily being accommodated in the Mbukushu Traditional Authority building. Two senior inspectors shared the Rundu circuit, but they have now appointed a new inspector, allowing the senior inspectors more time to co-ordinate circuit activities and to establish cluster system structures throughout the region. All eight circuit offices have been equipped with the necessary furnishings, stationery, photocopy and fax machines.

Training workshops: Workshops in leadership and management skills were presented to cluster centre principals and inspectors. Courses on industrial relations, management supervision and performance management were offered to REO personnel to ensure that senior education managers were better equipped with skills needed for cluster implementation. A workshop on "Practices and skills for cluster centre principals and circuit inspectors" was presented in 2000 to review and enhance progress on cluster issues. Workshops for the Lower Primary Reform programme, using the cluster structure, have been supported by BEP. School board training is underway, with inspectors training school board members together with principals of each circuit.

Organisational links and logistical support: In spite of the insecurity, firm links have been maintained between the BEP team, which is now based in Windhoek, and the REO management. The co-ordinating role played by the TRC manager in Rundu allows for support to be continued in the region. An off-road vehicle and a VW bus have been allocated to the region for the work to continue as smoothly as possible. A package of stationery equipment has been allocated by BEP to all cluster centres, to facilitate meetings and workshops.

BENEFITS AND INNOVATIONS OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

The time allocated for research work in the Rundu region was limited due to the unfavourable security situation. Circuit offices and the REO were visited and selected cluster centre principals were interviewed. A range of benefits and innovations are evident, particularly in clusters that are active. The following information was gleaned during interviews, and represents a range of opinions and experiences.

Improved efficiency in administration has been noticeable throughout the region. Communication links were strengthened once the cluster centres were established, and inspectors moved to decentralised offices. Virtually all business can now be conducted through the cluster centres. The ordering of equipment, textbooks and stationery, and the distribution of material, is now co-ordinated through each cluster, which has eliminated much of the former inefficiency. Statistical information is now channelled through the cluster centre and deadlines are being met. Even the remote inland schools are making an effort to meet deadlines by linking up to the cluster centre. In the past, the inspector had to drive to all schools to collect the necessary information, making it impossible to meet deadlines.

Improved commitment and participation: Teachers from many satellite schools have made an effort to attend meetings even if they have had to walk. Most teachers have responded well to the expectation that they should meet deadlines for schemes of work and for contributions to subject

meetings so that learners are properly prepared for common exam papers. Even school cleaners are involved, for example by binding clusters' exam papers once they have been duplicated. All principals now have the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes through principals' committees. Many of them have commented that they have experienced this as empowering. They can now be active in school affairs rather than passively carrying out directives from a higher level. There is also greater community participation through school board involvement in decision-making exercises.

Mutual support and sharing amongst teachers and principals has increased and there is good co-operation between schools on the whole. More open discussions take place. Along the river, where access is easy, teachers are starting to visit each other even informally, to help each other and to share ideas especially where cluster centre principals and inspectors encourage this. The remoteness of inland schools often precludes integration into circuit activities. One circuit has attempted to "twin" remote schools in the bush to more developed schools at the river for subject groups. In this way, teachers from remote schools benefit from the input of more experienced teachers.

Many principals now support each other in dealing with problems such as teacher absenteeism. Principals in the cluster are called together for a discussion when there is a problem, recommendations are made and reported to the school board. The minutes are sent to the inspector who is only called in for serious problems. Sharing is extended to issues such as applications for birth certificates that can be handled for the whole cluster. Principals in the cluster management committees of some clusters have been given tasks to submit to meetings regarding education development in the cluster. Principals are also responsible for collecting funds for the cluster. Cluster centre principals stand in for the inspector if he is away, and HODs stand in for principals and assist with workloads.

Teacher allocations: There is now greater awareness of policies regarding teacher allocations and school upgrading. The analysis of school statistics for the cluster helps stakeholders to make informed recommendations to the inspector and school boards. Transfers and appointments of teachers are discussed at cluster meetings. Recommendations are then forwarded to school boards for discussion, and from there to the inspector for approval. Internal arrangements within clusters are being made to place teachers in the schools where they will be most useful. In one cluster a teacher from an overstaffed school was moved to a multi-grade teaching school to relieve that teacher.

Planning of activities and developments is now done in a collective way at cluster management level, with the facts at hand to make reasonable recommendations. Issues such as the planning of classrooms, repair of classrooms, book and stationery orders are beginning to be planned in the cluster context. School development plans are discussed at cluster meetings and principals learn from each other.

Examination system: Learners are better prepared, and teachers work on a standardised basis as a result of a common examination system. All cluster principals share exam duties such as monitoring, setting up, supervising the binding, invigilation and moderation. Teachers meet to analyse results and search for ways to improve them. Rundu SS has set up a holiday school for Grade 10 learners who want extra tuition.

School boards have been trained in several clusters, and in many cases they have agreed to provide funds for cluster activities. For example, the transport of examination board members to copy exam papers in Rundu is usually covered by school funds. At many schools, parents now take an active interest and visit the schools daily because they are involved in the decision-making process. Some schools are opened each morning by a school board member. School boards are beginning to submit reports to circuit offices about teachers failing to do their jobs. The idea of a joint cluster school board is being explored in several circuits.

Links with other programmes: Activities performed by various projects have promoted the use of the cluster system. For example, the Basic Education Support Project (BES) II Project offers training to all principals and heads of department (HODs) through modules. BES II also has resource teachers

running their school improvement programme. Two schools in two clusters have been identified to participate in the project, and they will feed their insights into their clusters. This project also uses the cluster system by requiring that teachers meet within their clusters to discuss the learning modules.

Addressing training needs: Workshops have been organised within clusters. For example, a one-day workshop was held on continuous assessment and cross-curricular teaching, which made use of dynamic cluster-based facilitators who had been trained by subject advisors. Other clusters have addressed administrative problems such as financial management. Cluster centres are beginning to be used as bases for training, for example in personnel matters.

The cascade model for training feedback has been effective where principals have co-operated and the cluster centre principal has been enthusiastic. The same method is now being used to reach school board members.

Advisory services are put to active use in the region and are starting to do much of their work through the clusters. They are preparing a programme of cluster-based activities, based on cluster and circuit year programmes and NIED courses. They also aim to reach as many subject meetings as possible, and to hold workshops in response to needs in clusters.

Fund-raising: A fund for examination costs has been established in one cluster. All teachers and principals contribute to this fund each term. Some schools have campaigns to enlighten parents on the need to raise funds, for example to buy a risograph for the cluster. The Kandjimi Circuit Office pooled funds from teachers and schools in the circuit and bought a risograph for the circuit.

Teachers' conferences are circuit-based. They are initiated and organised by circuit and cluster committees, rather than being REO directives. Ideas are now coming up from the classroom in response to real needs, instead of through a top-down approach.

Creative ideas are emerging, such as a quiz competition in Maths and Science, organised by teachers in and for the Ncamagoro circuit. It was held on a Saturday to enable schools from the circuit to attend. Subject advisors were invited to be the judges. It was fun as well as stimulating for learners.

CONSTRAINTS AND CONCERNS

The constraints and concerns described below represent a range of opinions and experiences expressed and are not general to all clusters.

Lack of commitment to the system: Some cluster centre principals lack initiative and are not really using the system effectively. Only a few clusters are really functional, and not all teachers are using the system for meetings and resources. In fact, many subject groups do not convene meetings. The examination committees, which represent a limited number of teachers, are the most active groups.

Capabilities of cluster centre principals are not all up to standard. For example, many are unable to train school boards, and this activity has had to become a circuit exercise. The cascade approach to training has not always been effective due to principals' limited abilities and the lack of follow-up. Not all cluster centre principals co-operate with circuit management, for example in contributing to a plan of action for the circuit for the year.

Some remote cluster centres are only temporary structures, with poorly trained principals. Several cluster centre principals who are not suitable are in the process of being replaced, and some cluster centres might change. Some remote clusters have too many schools to be viable, and the large distances make it difficult to hold meetings. The boundaries of these clusters should be revised.

Advisory services are still too centralised. The 15 advisory teachers based in Rundu visit schools according to their own programme at this stage. They only occasionally attend subject meetings or hold workshops at cluster centres, because doing so requires that have to travel away from their base in Rundu.

Planning is too centralised and the renovation of some cluster centres has not been approved, although some of these are in dire need of attention. For example, many cluster centres are short of essential facilities such as toilets, telephones and electricity.

Duplicating facilities are lacking and this forces inspectors or principals to travel to Rundu to copy question papers. Once again, this activity has remained centralised to a large extent. Circuit offices have photocopy machines, but they are either broken or only a limited number of copies are allowed and can thus not handle the volume required for exam papers. Maintenance costs for the risograph bought by the Kandjimi circuit office are high, and funds for these extra costs are in short supply, Schools having risographs are obliged to duplicate question papers for the whole circuit, placing a heavy financial burden on these schools.

Security situation: An uneasy calm and strong military presence characterises the region. Many schools were non-functional during the height of the conflict. Evidence of the disruption to services in the region is still visible, and neither freedom of movement nor trust has yet been restored. The Omega cluster is in the security zone, and the school relies on materials and circuit question papers to be delivered by the army, which does not always happen.

Distances to remote schools preclude principals and teachers from benefiting fully from cluster and circuit activities in many cases. The schools in the remote inland areas are geographically scattered, and meetings between them are difficult. Even for the inspector to reach cluster centres can be arduous.

Attitude problems in some cases prevent teachers and principals from forming unified cluster meetings. Only motivated cluster centre principals make the effort to visit schools in the cluster to observe classes and to have discussions with principals. Resistance to cluster activities is often experienced where the satellite principal does not encourage a positive attitude among teachers.

Workload problems: Many cluster centre principals feel that they should be paid for the extra cluster duties and for deputising for the inspectors. Or they should at least get fringe benefits. The workload of cluster centre secretaries is high in active clusters,
where work for the cluster includes typing the minutes of meetings and examination papers. Many secretaries at schools are untrained and need training.

The lack of a BEP project co-ordinator has taken its toll on the effectiveness of the implementation phase of the cluster system. Progress was good in this region while there was a driving force offering stimulation, support and input. A great deal of momentum was lost after the withdrawal of BEP staff.

Changes in personnel retard the progress of the system, especially as newly appointed cluster centre principals do not always get proper induction. Inspectors have been moved between circuits, and one inspector is still in an acting capacity.

Commitment of inspectors: In spite of encouragement from the REO and BEP, there appears to be a measure of apathy among the inspectors. Circuit offices are not fully used to co-ordinate activities in the clusters. This may also be due partly to the security situation, and partly to the changes that have taken place in inspectors' posts.

The emphasis on an examination system was raised as an issue in the Rundu region. Some regional management officials feel that it detracts from the value of continuous assessment. Furthermore, it is

expensive and not all schools can participate because of distances. The REO has problems supplying all the paper and ink needed for each learner of each grade from Grades 5 to 12 to write two exams per year. Teaching time is lost through each grade having two exams.

Communication problems: Two circuit offices lack telephone connections. All circuit offices have been allocated fax machines but these are not yet installed, as they need a technician to do so. Several cluster centres and most schools are without telephones, so messages have to be relayed to schools or inspectors and cluster centre principals have to drive to schools to make contact.

Commitment of the REO to using the cluster system should be much greater. Circuit offices and cluster centres are not fully used as distribution points, and many services and decision-making activities are still too centralised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Some clusters are working well, but others need a great deal of support to get them functioning. The focus should therefore remain on the effective establishment of the structures. However, a flexible approach should allow well-established clusters to develop and focus on efficiency and quality in education. The following recommendations emerged as a result of interviews with people on how the cluster system can further be developed:

1. In terms of BEP's ongoing role in the region, it is important that a base again be set up in the region, headed up by a full-time BEP co-ordinator. It became obvious during the review that direct BEP input is needed to really activate and reactivate the cluster system.
2. Urgent attention needs to be given to equipping circuit offices properly as duty stations for inspection and advisory services, and to urging inspectors to activate circuit and cluster management committees in all circuits.
3. Ongoing logistical and professional support to circuit offices and cluster centres remains critical if quality education is to be promoted in the region.
4. Where training programmes have been delivered, follow-up should ensure that management and community outreach skills are being applied by the inspectorate and cluster centre principals. Training for secretaries of circuits, and for all school boards, has been scheduled and needs financial support.
5. The BEP should play an active role in linking and highlighting cluster and circuit issues to the REO, as well as supporting the activities of the REO through workshops.
6. Even though the Advisory Services are active in this region, BEP support is still needed in the follow-up training for Lower Primary Reform.
7. Specific needs mentioned during interviews with inspectors and cluster centre principals were as follows: all circuit offices should obtain a risograph and duplicating paper, and notice boards, flip charts and stationery to conduct workshops.
8. Even though circuit-based examinations are expensive, this practice should be encouraged as standards are raised when teachers are required to get the learners to the point that they can perform well after writing common exam papers.
9. The REO needs to show more commitment to the implementation of the cluster system now that the security upheavals in the region are settling down.
10. Inspectors need to see their roles within the cluster structures in a serious light, and really use the structures to their full extent, encouraging all stakeholders in their circuits to activate the cluster system. Permanent appointments need to be finalised where inspectors are still in an acting capacity.
11. More focus on the institutionalisation of the cluster system is needed. Structures that support the system need to be consolidated, especially at circuit management and cluster management levels.

12. School board training should be activated throughout the whole region, and parents need to be further involved in school activities.
13. Most cluster centres have limited meeting space and inadequate facilities. They need office space for the principal, storage space, library and laboratory facilities and toilets. Some cluster centres need renovation. The REO should attend to these needs.
14. Some remote inland clusters are too large to be feasible, and they need to be revised. Cluster-based committees will then be more effective, and teachers will have a better chance of getting to meetings.
15. The concept of informal hostels attached to remote schools should be promoted to accommodate more learners from Grades 5 to 7 at remote schools. Many learners drop out at this level because of the difficulties of boarding near the river. This situation can be alleviated through the cluster system.
16. All cluster centres should at least be upgraded to full primary level with permanent structures, and informal hostels if there is a need.

KATIMA MULILO EDUCATION REGION

SUMMARY

The clustering process was initiated in the Katima Mulilo region with a baseline study in 1999. In January 2000, the circuits and clusters were introduced together with formal management structures to facilitate the decentralisation process. Decentralised circuit offices were established, and circuit management committees were introduced to establish a network, ensuring communication and co-operation between the circuit offices and cluster centres, and to promote involvement and decision-making at all levels. Cluster management committees were then established to enable cluster centre principals, satellite school principals and HOD's to exchange information and experiences, and to address teaching and learning problems in schools. In addition, examination committees were established to co-ordinate exams, to help teachers in preparing learners for examinations, and to improve teaching standards throughout the region. A range of other committees evolved spontaneously to meet the needs of many stakeholders. Examples are subject committees, sports committees and school board committees. The delegation of authority from the REO to circuits and clusters has strengthened the implementation of the cluster system in the region. School staff members, previously not involved in decision-making processes, are now empowered to make decisions about cluster centres, satellite schools and other school affairs. These are important and relevant decisions. The team approach, which stretches across many levels, involves previously isolated teachers and schools in a supportive network. By sharing schemes of work and exam papers teachers are encouraged to meet deadlines, and a spirit of competition is developing in the region. The workloads of cluster centre principals have increased, but this has not been perceived as a problem where the outcomes have been rewarding. Efficiency has improved, for example, stationery and textbook orders are organised from within each cluster and distributed from the circuit office. Previously all schools had to fetch their equipment from the REO. Communities are better informed about education issues through the activation of school boards. The cluster system has progressed from a phase of implementation to one of consolidation and institutionalisation in the region. It has also proved to be an excellent example of how education can be decentralised from the REO to the whole region.

map

REGIONAL EDUCATION MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

The school clustering process in the Katima Mulilo Education Region began in January 2000. From the start, the Regional Education Office (REO) has been involved in and has supported the cluster system. Formal management structures were set up in support of the cluster system, decision-making powers were delegated to circuit management committees and cluster management committees. Committees were encouraged to take decisions, which were recorded and reported to higher levels. Feedback ensured that omissions or inaccuracies were corrected. In this way, the educational management of the region has undergone a major shift from centralised decision-making to decentralised, participatory management. The management structures through which the new style are implemented, are described below.

Decentralisation of circuit offices
Following the government policy of decentralisation, the REO is currently transferring responsibilities, functions and resources from the REO to the circuit offices and cluster centres. Five circuit offices and 19 cluster centres were established in January 2000. Originally there were four circuit inspectors and one hostel inspector. A decision was made to incorporate hostel duties into each circuit and to create five circuits. The inspectors moved into their decentralised offices in March 2000.

The objective of the circuit offices is to bring education closer to the people, allowing teachers, learners, parents, communities and NGOs to have a greater say in decisions. The participation and empowerment of educational professionals and all other stakeholders develops a culture of democracy and ownership of the education system. A soft contract was drawn up between the REO and all principals, committing the principals to honour their duties and to serve as examples of good management.

The circuit inspectors are based in their circuits and keep in contact with the REO. They have the power to make decisions and recommendations to the REO, and they ensure that all cluster centre principals are aware of their roles and functions. Circuit inspectors have been tasked with specific duties by the REO:

- Facilitate co-operation and communication between each circuit office and the cluster centres;
- Visit cluster centres and other schools when necessary, using MBESC transport;
- Conduct and facilitate circuit-based in-service training;
- Be responsible for the collection, explanation and distribution of data and circulars;
- Ensure the implementation of ministerial directives and reform programmes;
- Identify subject-related needs and support schools through visits;
- Identify gaps in school management and address such problems;
- Take care of standards, promoting academic and sports standards by encouraging schools to strive for their objectives;
- Establish and maintain good relations with all stakeholders in their circuits and maintain contact and good relations with other circuits;
- Report to the REO and senior inspector on a monthly basis and meet with the regional director each term.
- Circuit offices function as intermediate stations for equipment and material supplies. As such, they are expected to be well-equipped and soundly organised and managed to enhance education and set a good example in the circuit.

Establishment of Circuit and Cluster Management Committees, and Examination Committees
Several committees have been established to strengthen the management of circuits and cluster centres, to enable inspectors and cluster centre principals to participate in decision-making processes, to encourage commitment and accountability through collaborative networking among stakeholders, and to improve learning and teaching in schools.

A Circuit Management Committee is composed of the circuit inspector as chairperson, all cluster centre principals from the circuit and other co-opted members, such as an advisory teacher. Meetings take place once a month or once a term. Ideas and experiences relating to the administration of schools in each circuit are exchanged at the meetings, helping to inspire cluster centre principals to give effective, quality service to school communities. The circuit management committees deal with and resolve school issues referred to them by cluster management committees. Minutes are sent to the REO through the senior inspector, serving to inform the REO about school activities in the circuit, drawing the attention of the REO to specific achievements or problems experienced the circuits. When inspectors have to be away from their offices, cluster centre principals stand in for them on a rotational basis so that the circuit offices remain open and the work continues.

A Cluster Management Committee is composed of a cluster centre principal as chairperson, school principals from each school in the cluster (called satellite schools) and co-opted members such as teachers who serve on the management teams of the satellite schools. Meetings take place once a month or once a term. These committees enable cluster centre principals and school principals to exchange information and their educational experiences. They also act as a platform to address teaching and learning problems in schools, and they empower principals by giving them confidence to make their own decisions. Issues are discussed and solved at this level, where possible. When cluster management meetings were first launched, lists of issues to be discussed were put onto agendas to get an interchange of ideas going. Participants have become accustomed to the discussions and now choose their own topics for agendas. Items for agendas are submitted in advance and are presented at the meetings by the people who submitted them. Minutes reflect what is happening in the cluster and are forwarded to the circuit inspector and the REO to keep them informed about the issues being discussed.

Examination Committees have been established to co-ordinate and assist teachers to prepare learners for examinations, but especially for the externals exams written in Grades 7, 10 and 12. They consist of a chairperson who may be a head of department (HOD), or a deputy head or a senior teacher; a subject head or another co-opted teacher. In some clusters, each school has its own exam committee with a co-ordinating committee for the cluster, which informs the cluster management committee about the setting of exam papers and timetables. The aim is for schools to work towards quality education and acceptable exam results. Previous reports are scrutinised and problems are pinpointed and addressed. Teachers who teach classes that are due to write external examinations, are informed of examination requirements and assisted with planning for examinations. Regular meetings are held and minutes are forwarded to school principals and cluster centre principals who monitor the effectiveness of the examination committees in their clusters. Where possible, the cluster centre takes responsibility for duplicating exam papers, and schools pay for the copies. Timetables for meetings and exams are drawn up in advance to ensure that all teachers are aware of the deadlines. The concept has been expanded in some circuits to cover all examinations from Grades 5 to 12.

Subject Committees: The need to focus on the upgrading of specific subjects has resulted in the establishment of subject committees in many clusters. Subject co-ordinators are selected for each subject, and they do class visits to pinpoint problem areas and give advice. Advisory teachers support the subject co-ordinators and give workshops as needs are identified. Subject co-ordinators ensure that teachers have relevant teaching materials and monitor the extent to which teachers are covering the syllabus, advising them where necessary. They also monitor continuous assessment marks. They liase with examination committees on the setting of exam papers, help to moderate papers and then check how to see how each school fares. These cluster-based subject committees also provide a framework for in-service training.

Other cluster committees: As a result of the benefits experienced from sharing ideas in the management committees, a range of other committees has been established for different purposes. These have evolved in various clusters in response to certain needs, and vary from one cluster to another. They are cluster-based and include a heads of department committee, a subject heads committee, a sports committee, a school board committee, a life skills committee, and a budgeting

committee. In some clusters, each committee has a different principal as chairperson, reporting on the committee's progress to the cluster management committee.

Distribution points for all schools: In most cases, textbooks, stationery and other equipment are delivered to the circuit offices. Cluster centres are responsible for collecting the items and ensuring that they are distributed to satellite schools. Some cluster centres appoint a teacher to do this duty. Inventories of school equipment, used for planning and development purposes, are channelled through cluster centres. Cluster centre principals check and correct statistical schedules with the principals, and then send them through to the inspector.

Advisory services are expected to correlate their activities within the cluster system. One proposal for the future is to co-opt a subject advisor onto each circuit management committee so that pertinent issues are brought to the attention of an advisory teacher and therefore handled immediately.

STEPS TOWARDS ACTIVATION OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

Baseline study: The baseline study " The development needs of schools and clusters of schools in the Katima Mulilo Education Region" was completed in December 1999, and this set the stage for the implementation of the clusters. Several schools were rationalised following recommendations in this report. Some changes were made to the recommended cluster centres to maximise accessibility and to have the most competent principals in place.

Appointment of BEP Regional Co-ordinator: Mr Albert Ndopu was appointed in 1999 to facilitate the implementation of the cluster system, and to represent the BEP in terms of arranging BEP activities and inputs in the region. Mr Ndopu has provided an essential link between the stakeholders in the field and the REO.

Awareness Campaign: The Regional Management Team, including the regional director, regional education officer, senior inspector and BEP co-ordinator, addressed and attended meetings in each circuit in March and April 2000, and ensured that all structures were explained in writing and over the radio. Educators, political leaders, trade unions, community members, school board members, student representative councils (SRC) and learners were involved in the process. Furthermore, all principals were involved in a meeting to discuss and explain issues regarding the decentralised education system in the region.

Study tour for principals: Nine principals undertook a tour of three education regions in March 2000 to learn from the experiences of others.

Regional Education Awards: An award system for the best schools and best learners was introduced in February 2000 to encourage a spirit of competition and commitment to progress in the region. The idea will be extended to award the best cluster and circuit as well.

Infrastructure improvements: Inspectors moved into their decentralised offices and living quarters in March 2000 at Sibbinda, Chinchimane, Ngoma and Bukalo. These offices have provided closer contact with clusters and better support for schools in each circuit. The facilities at Sibbinda were built by the MBESC in 1999. The others were constructed with funding from KfW, the financial department of German foreign aid. The inspector based in Katima Mulilo has an office at the Katima Combined School, and will get eventually get an office in the town.

Establishment of management and examination committees: These structures were introduced in June 2000 to give the cluster system a defined framework. The concept of decentralisation and its benefits was explained. The roles of various stakeholders were clarified, and the functions of

committees were defined. Decision-making powers were delegated from the regional management level down to circuit and cluster level. Channels of communication were defined to entrench the decentralised structures of education. All committees now meet once a month or once a term.

Training programmes: BEP arranged six training modules for cluster centre principals on effective school management, and on the management and maintenance of school resources. BEP will shortly assess the effectiveness of these training modules. A short-term study on school-based management and supervisory services was done to clarify the responsibilities of inspectors and to assist cluster centre principals in developing their clusters. Other courses have been offered in the region which have enhanced the implementation of the cluster system. These are:

- the IECD performance management course for HODs and principals;
- the trainer of trainers course for cluster centre principals and inspectors;
- the school board training course for inspectors;
- several performance-oriented courses for regional office staff;
- strategic planning and budgeting for cluster centre principals;
- workshops for principals on personnel rules and regulations.

In-service training: The cluster system is being used more and more to train phase and subject facilitators. Subject facilitators, who are active participants in subject and examination committees, have already been selected and will be receiving training from advisory services. Lower primary facilitators are currently being selected for training.

Advisory committees and regional education forums: Circuit and cluster management committees will appoint representatives to stand on these regional committees.

BENEFITS AND INNOVATIONS OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

Sixteen of the 19 cluster centres in the region, as well as the five circuit offices were visited. The f following information was gleaned and represents a range of opinions and experiences expressed.

Regional empowerment: The delegation of authority to circuits and clusters has strengthened the cluster system in the region. Regional officials explained the new approaches and structures to all stakeholders, and have supported the implementation of these structures. The BEP advisor played a very active role in the implementation process. Stakeholders who attempted to bypass the new management structure have been referred back to the correct level. A good grasp of the system and of its importance thus been entrenched.

In the past, school staff members were not really involved in decision-making processes. Now they are exposed to what is happening in education. They have been empowered through the circuit and cluster management committees to help make decisions about cluster centres as well as satellite schools, and these decisions have local relevance. A bottom-up approach involving all stakeholders has replaced the top-down management style.

Cluster centre principals have been authorised to visit schools to share ideas and to identify problems, whereas previously they had no brief to interact with other schools. Cluster school members now form a unified front to deal with issues, resulting in faster and more effective solutions. All stakeholders develop competence as they learn to make decisions and take responsibility within their clusters. Cluster centre principals develop their management skills when acting in the place of inspectors, as do HODs when acting for principals.

School board committees for the cluster now develop internal policies on how to deal with issues like truancy. Parents have become more involved in making decisions relating to school and have become more involved in their children's education, partly through the promotion of Parents' Days in some clusters. The REO's positive approach to decentralisation has motivated teachers who are now keener to succeed. Key organisations, such as the teachers' union and the Caprivi Principals' Association, have accepted the cluster system and support it.

Sharing of management responsibilities: There was jealousy between principals when the clusters were introduced, some not understanding why they had not been selected as cluster centre principals. However, with the inspectors supporting the cluster centre principals and encouraging participation of all principals in the cluster management committees, there is now a great degree of ownership.

Management skills have been promoted through deputising at different levels. Cluster centre principals stand in for absentee inspectors on a rotational basis, allowing the circuit office to remain open and for work to continue. The inspector highlights issues to be dealt with, and allocates the circuit office vehicle for the work to be undertaken. In the same way, teachers in senior management are involved in schools' management issues when they stand in for principals when they are absent. Senior management teachers are included on cluster management committees in many clusters, thus facilitating a flow of information through the system.

School management has improved since cluster centres are well managed and their results have improved. In several cases, a positive example has been set for other schools in the cluster and a competitive spirit has developed. The administration of schools has further improved through training, which has been followed up at cluster management meetings. Schools are now encouraged to ensure that all teachers have job descriptions and duty sheets so that they clearly understand their responsibilities. Schools are managed as networks since good access between schools was prioritised when the cluster system was designed.

Workloads of cluster centre principals have increased, but this has not been perceived as a problem where the outcomes have been rewarding. Some cluster centre principals have balanced their workloads through delegation to senior school management, thus empowering these teachers as well. Many HODs are involved in cluster management committees, sharing responsibilities and authority. Some cluster centre principals no longer teach promotion subjects so as to reduce their workloads. Other cluster centre principals perceive the teaching of promotion subjects as a challenge. Internal arrangements are being made within schools to reduce cluster centre principals' teaching loads. In this overstaffed region, the overstaffing has facilitated the cluster system as teachers from overstaffed schools have been relocated to schools where they can support cluster activities.

Principals are now encouraged to take more responsibility for improving the performance of learners. They are expected to implement and monitor structures that promote efficient exam preparation, and monitor how the teachers do continuous assessment.

Improved efficiency: Because the inspector's office is within easier reach of the schools, he maintains better contact with them. Problems are addressed quickly and solved more easily. One such problem, teacher absenteeism, has been considerably reduced because the cluster centre principals and satellite principals have greater authority and decision-making powers. Decisions are made collectively because all stakeholders are involved.

Stationery and textbook orders are placed by the cluster centre and distributed from the circuit office. Previously all schools had to fetch their equipment from the REO. In most cases, cluster centre principals collect materials from the circuit office and deliver them to satellite schools without complaint. They use the visits to catch up on progress and problems in the satellite schools. Problems are discussed and are usually solved during these meetings. This innovation saves time and transport, since all problems were previously referred to inspectors who were based in the REO.

Pooled resources in clusters: Principals or HODs from the cluster now meet to supervise the setting and execution of exams. In some circuits, secretaries from satellite schools are brought to the cluster centre to assist with the typing of common exam papers. A cluster centre in Katima Mulilo is being renovated and a library and computer room are being added; these facilities will be shared with other schools in the cluster.

Schools in a cluster share their resources with other schools that have shortages of materials, such as chairs, books or stationery. Human resources are also shared. For example, when a secretary is ill at examination time, other cluster secretaries fill the gap and take over the typing of examination papers. Where a teacher in cluster is ill, other subject teachers step in, working according to a relief timetable so that all of them can contribute to the classes.

Appointments and transfers of teachers: These are usually discussed with school boards within clusters, before being referred to the inspector for approval. In many cases, the inspector and cluster centre principal visit the affected schools and discuss the various options with the relevant staff and school board members. Consensus is reached and a plan of action is implemented. Circuit management committees are now able to balance teachers in the circuit, often through recommending internal transfers. Where possible, transfers are made within clusters or circuits, and are better accepted that way. Internal arrangements also now allow for cluster centre principals to be allocated additional staff from satellite schools that are overstaffed. Furthermore, appropriately qualified teachers are now being shared between senior secondary schools in remote areas to improve the teaching of certain subjects.

Training: The cascade model for training has been used so that inspectors and cluster centre principals pass on the training to satellite principals and school board members, cluster by cluster. The cascade model was used to conduct effective school management training. Follow-up by inspectors ensures that training is implemented. Teachers are now encouraged through their clusters to upgrade their qualifications. Basic Education Teachers' Diploma (BETD) in-service training courses are well supported by teachers in the region.

In-service training has been organised for secretaries of the circuit, in a cluster context. Some cluster management committee meetings are being used as informal training sessions, for example, to train people in stock control and office management. In this way school management is slowly being improved.

Mutual support: Principals and teachers are now in a position to learn from each other, to share experiences and ideas, to assist each other with problems, to consult and co-operate at all levels. The morale of teachers has been boosted as common schemes of work and exam papers have allowed them to improve their efforts within a supportive context. They have been encouraged by improved exam results. Subject teachers throughout the cluster, and even throughout the circuit, now know each other by name and assist each other. Regular meetings stimulate the exchange of ideas within and between clusters. Teachers now know what is required of them and are forced to progress. School visits within the cluster create a culture of sharing and mutual support. Where distances are a problem, the willing sharing of transport costs and vehicles allows meetings to take place. Principals are more likely to seek help in dealing with problems because they are less likely to feel threatened by criticism from others.

Communication across phases: The combination of primary and secondary schools in clusters has proved useful, as teachers have become more aware of the needs and problems of each phase. Teachers are now aware of the requirements for progression to a higher phase and strive to prepare learners adequately. Discussions about English versus mother tongue instruction have become more meaningful where both primary and secondary points of view are available.

Community awareness has been strengthened where principals have held meetings to inform regional councillors, school board members and community members about education issues. School boards make recommendations regarding staff appointments and transfers, building needs and school

finances. Recommendations are relayed to local principals, then to the cluster centre principals and management committees, and then to the inspector, with discussion at each stage. School boards, together with principals, also deal more actively with issues such as teacher absenteeism and poor attendance of learners. The schools have asked board members to approach the parents of truants to impress upon them how important it is that they supervise their children's schooling.

In so doing, ordinary parents as well school board members are more involved in the schooling of their children. Communities are becoming generally aware of the need for schooling. Whereas school boards simply used to represent the parents in the past, they are now more broadly interested in education and have a much better grasp of school issues.

Communities often tend to politicise recommendations to downgrade schools, to move teachers or not to upgrade schools. However, with greater community involvement, principals and inspectors have explained such rationalisations to parents, giving them a better understanding of the many factors involved.

Links to other programmes: The BES II School Improvement Programme has selected schools from certain clusters, and resource teachers are being trained to run the programme, with the inspector being informed of activities. BES II also offers training to principals and HODs through modules. Tasks have to be completed by individuals, schools and clusters, promoting the idea of performance, leadership and accountability by all management members, and promoting the links to the cluster system.

Life Science clusters, which were already established through the region, are used for the secondary subject groups. Meetings usually take place at a cluster centre, and mostly involve all junior secondary schools in a circuit or cluster.

Cluster committees: The following committees evolved in the region as a result of the implementation of the system:

- A school board committee, consisting of members from all satellite school boards, meets to discuss and find solutions to common problems.
- A cluster library committee ensures that resources and skills are shared between schools.
- A counselling committee deals with emotional and social issues, investigating poor performance of learners.
- A sports committee co-ordinates and promotes sports events for the cluster, and promotes a competitive spirit where one cluster team plays against other cluster teams.
- A cultural committee encourages parents, skilled in crafts and music, to teach the learners. Parents also arrange cultural functions for fund-raising purposes.
- A life skills committee has been formed in one cluster to deal with issues such as learning techniques, HIV/AIDS, and emotional and social problems. Another cluster is considering delegating the task of teaching life skills to one teacher who will teach it as a subject at all the cluster schools.
- A disciplinary committee for the cluster involves school boards, setting up a common disciplinary code for all satellite schools, and arranges meetings, with minutes and recommendations being sent to the inspector.
- A financial committee seeks to prevent the misuse of school funds for the cluster, to optimise the use of school funds at schools within the cluster, and also organises a cluster fund for catering at meetings and for transport costs. Funds are raised at sports and cultural events and through donations.

In clusters where there are several committees, each committee has a different principal as chairperson who also reports on the committee's activities to the cluster management committee. The cluster management committee is therefore informed of activities within the cluster, and is able to give inputs where necessary.

Planning: Cluster centres are now used to gather information about all cluster schools, and to make recommendations on needs for physical facilities. Statistical returns are discussed at cluster management committees to clarify planning needs. School boards are invited from the whole cluster and presented with planning needs for physical facilities and projects to upgrade schools. The regional education planner has visited schools to explain regulations and financial constraints, and he discussed funding allocations for the 2002 building programme at a meeting of cluster centre principals. With such information at hand, schools and school boards now make informed decisions about planning needs. Some school boards have recommended the level of labour input that community members can contribute. This approach has begun to resolve the problem of parent apathy, which set in when the Food for Work Project replaced voluntary labour contributions of parents to schools.

Cluster centres receive priority where funds are available for development, to ensure that they are able to render services to the rest of the cluster as efficiently and continuously as possible. Cluster meeting rooms are being built at selected cluster centres with KfW funding. Communication has been improved, for example, by supplying solar telephones and solar power to run photocopy machines in areas without telephone and electricity lines. During the annual floods, three clusters are regularly cut off from their circuit offices, but the facilities at the cluster centres now enable them to continue operating.

Improved exam results: Teachers are aware that they have to work harder to ensure that learners achieve satisfactory results when writing common exam papers for the cluster. They do not want their results to be seen as substandard. Principals have to ensure that schemes of work are completed and that teachers work efficiently to prepare learners for exams. The common schemes of work in all grades and in all subjects promote appropriate standards by forcing teachers to keep in step with other schools in the group.

At least one circuit-based examination is now undertaken each year in all subjects for as many grades as possible. This allows for better control of standards. It has saved resources, as only one master sheet is required for risograph duplication for the whole circuit. Cluster-based examinations have been set up for the other terms. Common schemes of work are drawn up, and most circuits try to finish the syllabus by July, and to use the remainder of the year for revision. In some cases, examination papers are shared between circuits to achieve common standards and to give mutual support.

In most clusters, examination committees are headed by HODs, who are in turn represented on the cluster management committees. They draw up examination timetables and regulations, arrange for invigilation and moderation of papers. Examination committee members visit Grade 10 learners during the year to motivate them to learn for the exams. In some clusters, Grade 10 learners who do badly during the August examinations are brought back for extra lessons in the August holidays.

Budgeting: Separate budgets are compiled for each school, for the cluster by the cluster management committee, and for the circuit. Stationery and textbook orders are placed by each cluster, and financial management skills have been upgraded by involving all principals in this process.

Other services: Personnel services, government stores and general services are beginning to use a cluster-based approach to get information to schools in the circuit.

Spirit of competition: Awards and floating trophies created by the REO for the best schools and the best learners have had a very positive effect. In future the performance of the best cluster will also be rewarded. Competition motivates improvements and boosts morale.

In some cases, cluster centre principals have taken up the challenge of teaching promotion subjects and getting good results, as an example to other teachers. Clusters within a circuit are now encouraged to outdo each other in circuit-based exams. Praise has been given for good results. Cluster identities have developed, with cluster teams competing against each other in sports fixtures.

The cluster centre has become the co-ordinating office, making programmes for all committees, but always with input from committee members. Many cluster centres have displays of facts about the whole cluster such as school facilities, enrolments, learner:teacher ratios, and examination results. This has helped to pinpoint where changes need to take place. There are also displays of information in most cluster centres regarding regulations for the different committees and the functions of the school board, together with an organogram of the cluster system and a map of schools. With such facts at hand, cluster committees are now able to plan for the cluster and the schools. Parents are also informed directly of the needs of schools.

Commitment is promoted: Some cluster centre principals, who have demanding schedules that take them away from schools, are dedicated to catching up their teaching duties. Some of them call their learners to attend classes in the evenings. Some even use holidays to catch up on lost time. Inspectors also show great commitment. For example, the Ngoma inspector uses a canoe to visit floodplain schools during the flood season. Cluster centre principals in these areas have been motivated enough to use canoes to reach workshops.

Addressing trends in the region: Circuit inspectors have been tasked by the REO to investigate the decreasing enrolments in rural areas, and they have used the cluster structures to investigate this trend. They have found that urbanisation is increasing in Caprivi because of the perception that opportunities are better in towns; and because Katima Mulilo has several housing projects, which tempt people to live in town rather than in rural areas. Many teachers teaching in rural areas buy houses in Katima Mulilo, and send their children to school there, while they teach in rural schools. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is also taking a massive toll in the region. Furthermore, many Caprivians have moved to other regions or countries. For these kinds of reasons, rural schools have decreasing enrolments and urban schools are overcrowded. Some rural schools are now being downgraded, as these small schools qualify for too few teachers to make higher grades viable. Satellite and cluster centre principals, school boards and regional councillors all share in the decisions made to make these changes.

CONSTRAINTS AND CONCERNS

The commitment of all role players is essential to maximise the positive impacts of the cluster system. Extra work and effort is required and the system flounders where this is not forthcoming. Frustrations due to, for example, the distances to be travelled and lack of telephones and other facilities can be demotivating factors. The following points represent the views and experiences of a range of interviewees in the region, and do not necessarily apply to all clusters.

The selection of cluster centres: The main criteria used to select cluster centres were the geographic locations of schools and the facilities available at schools. A few principals have proved unsuitable as cluster centre principals because they lack the required management skills, and are not confident in taking decisions and delegating responsibility. The functioning of the cluster management committee is not always maintained in clusters where a cluster centre principal is newly appointed, as is evident in the Mayuni cluster, and the cluster management committee does not yet have a role to play in the induction process of the new principal.

Supply of material, equipment and facilities: There is a shortage of material to duplicate and print examination papers throughout the region. This hampers the functioning of structures, such as exam committees, that have evolved as a result of the cluster system. The more developed cluster centres support other schools in their clusters to some extent, but the costs involved make this unsustainable in the long term. Where duplicating facilities are available at cluster centres or circuit offices, costs have been recovered by charging schools for copies. But in more remote areas where there is no electricity, it is extremely difficult to duplicate examination papers and efforts to run examinations often fail.

Some circuit offices that have risographs do not have electricity, or have unreliable generator power. Solar panels at schools have often been stolen, although some schools have secured the panels so that they cannot be removed.

There is a shortage of facilities, such as meeting rooms for cluster meetings and storage rooms for stores and equipment coming to the cluster centres for onward distribution to satellite schools. With the new emphasis on teamwork in clusters, resources such as computers, duplicating machines, and photocopiers are needed more urgently at cluster centres. The lack of well-equipped science laboratories, library facilities, and teaching materials at cluster centres limits the potential of using such facilities to serve all schools.

Financial constraints: Due to Ministry cutbacks, funds are often insufficient to cover the needs of schools for stationery, furniture and textbooks. This has limited the effectiveness of cluster activities.

Communication problems: Not all schools have telephones, which makes it difficult to plan cluster meetings. Several cluster centres have to use the radio or letters to notify satellite schools of meetings or that materials or equipment have arrived and must be collected. In some cases, principals or other school staff have to travel to satellite schools to deliver messages.

Time constraints and distances: Cluster centre principals are expected to attend training sessions, do school visits and organise meetings, almost operating as inspectors. Yet they also have teaching and administrative duties to attend to at their own schools, and time becomes a problem. Many schools in the region are remote and teachers or principals may struggle to get to meetings because of distances, and the lack of time after school hours. Few complain, however, and only those who are against attending the meetings anyway raised these issues as constraints. Schools west of Kongola, in the army-occupied zone, do not really participate in cluster activities because of distances and security problems. Several schools on the eastern floodplain are cut off from each other and from circuit offices during flood times, which makes it difficult to arrange meetings.

Attitude problems: Not all principals in a cluster necessarily co-operate in the cluster team. Some resent the fact that their schools were not selected as cluster centres, while others have political reasons for resisting inclusion into a cluster. The Sikosinyana cluster centre principal has attended training sessions and attempted to share information and ideas with other principals, but they have been unreceptive and resistant. Some principals have expressed the opinion that the cluster system is yet another informal system and that it is not obligatory.

Where the cluster centre principal is unmotivated, the implementation of the system is short-circuited. There have been no cluster meetings for the year in the Masokotwane cluster, even though training information should have been passed on to satellite principals. Some stakeholders feel that training is focused on cluster centre principals to the exclusion of other training needs.

Advisory services have a programme of panel visits for the region, and may be invited to schools with specific needs. However, they are often away at NIED workshops and therefore have little time to devote to schools. Some workshops are presented, but these are not followed up, and there is no obligatory report-back by facilitators. Progress in subject teaching can be hampered by the lack of professional input into the subject group programmes, thus retarding the functioning of cluster-based groups.

TRC input into the cluster system: The TRC in Katima Mulilo has not been active, but the recent appointment of a new manager of the TRC at Katima Mulilo should remedy this. The TRCs in rural areas are likewise inactive, but inspectors are considering appointing teachers to manage them. It is essential that these teacher-managers receive training in managing the facility, in running the facility computer and in co-ordinating outreach to teachers. Rural TRCs lack resources and equipment, which should be supplied by NIED.

Accessibility of inspector: Some cluster centre principals feel that the inspectors are away from their offices too frequently, on training courses, for example, and are not sufficiently accessible. Problems are therefore not resolved as quickly as they should be, and textbook distribution can be slow. Furthermore, the workloads of deputising cluster centre principals are increased when the inspectors are absent frequently.

Other line ministries are still centralised and do not fit in to the decentralised system. Requests for assistance regarding water or electrical issues have to go to the centralised offices. The personnel, procurement and government stores functions have not yet adapted to decentralisation, and blockages occur in the flow of services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, the implementation of the cluster system has been highly effective in the Katima Mulilo region. The system has really been used as a vehicle of decentralisation in the region, proving to be an excellent example of how decentralisation in education can be expanded from the REO to the whole region. All stakeholders in education now have a definite role to play in improving educational standards, as decisions and responsibilities are dealt with at lower levels as well as upwards through the system. The cluster system in the region has progressed so far that consolidation and institutionalisation are taking place, and certain needs should be addressed at this point. During interviews with inspectors and cluster centre principals, the following needs were identified:

- The entrenchment of cluster system structures has been highly effective throughout the region. Special attention should now be concentrated on the few clusters which offer resistance to these structures.
- A system of induction needs to be developed for new cluster centre principals and inspectors, to promote continuity when transfers take place.
- Inspectors should be supported in activating ineffectual clusters, perhaps by asking principals to chair cluster management meetings on a rotational basis.
- Inspectors should be encouraged to collaborate with colleagues in other circuits to exchange ideas and to support each other in solving a range of problems.
- A suggestion has been made that a regional examination officer be appointed to deal with shortfalls and problems in the examination system, and to give examination committees more support. This possibility should be investigated further.
- A deputy principal or HOD should be appointed at each cluster centre to carry out delegated duties and to relieve the workload of the cluster centre principal. A secretary is needed at each cluster centre to assist the centre's work.
- Planning activities should be promoted at cluster level, such as the rationalisation of schools with low enrolments offering secondary grades to very few learners.
- The development of community participation in education should be continued through school board activation.
- Training needs should be addressed as they arise. The skills of inspectors and cluster centre principals who have been trained should be used where this is feasible.
- Improved physical facilities, such as libraries, science laboratories and equipment would complement the demand for improved standards that is being driven by the cluster system.
- Cluster centres need storerooms and meeting facilities with furniture, which can become mini-resource centres.
- Resource centres should be established at circuit offices to create what would become decentralized district education centres. Advisory teachers should be based at these district centres, where they would manage the resource centres so as to improve teaching aids and methodology, and also feed back information to inspectors after school visits.

- The involvement of advisory teachers should be encouraged in the upgrading of subject teaching. The idea of an advisory teacher being co-opted onto each circuit management committee should be supported. This step will allow for better advisory support and rapid intervention when problems are identified.
- Workshop and copying equipment at each cluster centre will improve the quality of presentations. It would be most useful to have, for example, an overhead projector, a photocopier, typewriter, flipcharts and notice boards.
- Cluster-based training needs further support. For example, one cluster hopes to arrange training for sustainability – investigating how to generate funds and promote a mindset of self-support.
- BEP should continue to provide steel frameworks for classrooms or teachers' houses, in line with the BEP initiative to contribute to better facilities for cluster schools in remote areas.
- Pressure should be exerted on the line ministries to extend electrical and telephone services, at least to the cluster centres.
- Financial assistance should be offered to support networking and travel to other regions, so that stakeholders can learn from others and share ideas.

KHORIXAS EDUCATION REGION

SUMMARY

The clustering process started in the Khorixas region with a baseline study in 1999. Clusters within their circuits were established in 2000 after an extensive awareness campaign. A regional project team, comprising REO officials and the BEP regional advisor, was established to form a link between the REO and the school staff and inspectors, and has played an active role in the implementation of the cluster system. Most clusters have established cluster management committees as well as subject groups. Channels of communication have been opened, with many principals and teachers now sharing and solving problems together. The cluster management committees are proving useful as a forum for sharing ideas and supporting each other. Subject committees help to unify schemes of work and exam papers, thus providing support for teachers as well as ensuring that all teachers meet certain standards. A range of cluster-based activities now takes place as needs arise. Training programmes for cluster centre principals, school boards and secretaries have used the cluster system. The distribution of materials and collection of statistics through clusters has reduced the time and transport costs of inspectors, and has ensured that all schools receive and hand in paperwork in a timely fashion. However, it has placed an additional time, financial and transport burden on cluster centres. An effort is therefore being made at regional level to supply cluster centres with additional staff, such as a secretary or teacher, to alleviate the burdens on cluster principals. The circuit management level does not actively include cluster centre principals in a formal role at this stage, and the roles of inspectors and cluster centre principals are not always clear. The delegation of authority from the REO to inspectors and down to cluster centre principals remains limited. At present there may be good informal interaction, but little genuine decision-making at grassroots level and many decisions are referred back to higher levels. The benefits of clustering have been particularly evident in remote areas where teachers and small schools, which were previously isolated, are now part of a supportive network. Larger urban schools do not feel the need for the cluster structures to the same extent, as they are more autonomous and their teachers have supportive networks within their schools.

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REGIONAL EDUCATION MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

Since the finalisation of the school mapping and clustering exercise in October 1999, a great deal of activity has taken place to implement the cluster system. A regional project team, comprising the Regional Education Officer, Senior Inspector, Principal Subject Advisor and BEP Regional Advisor, was established to form a link between the REO and the school staff and inspectors. Circuit offices are already operation in Opuwo, Khorixas and Swakopmund, and offices at these localities are to be upgraded. A new inspector has recently been appointed in Omaruru, where a circuit office will be constructed. The following management structures have been established in the region to facilitate the implementation of the cluster system:

Cluster Management Committees:
Most clusters have established a cluster management committee comprising the cluster centre principal, as chairperson, and the principals from cluster schools. They meet each month or term. In some clusters, chairmanship is on a rotational basis to facilitate transport and to even out workloads. One committee member takes the minutes, which are then circulated by the cluster centre principal. The inspector and the BEP advisor receive copies as well. To ensure that all are involved, the cluster centre principal gathers agenda points from all principals before drawing up the agenda for the next meeting. The idea of cluster development plans to facilitate planning and progress in the cluster is taking hold. Clusters are also being encouraged to draw up mission statements. Principals of the semi-private schools in Walvis Bay participate in cluster meetings. In several clusters, HODs are also involved in the meetings to ensure the passing on of information down the line. This balances the problem of passive principals who may not be motivated to pass information to their staff. Cluster centre principals are starting to make school visits to their cluster schools to share ideas and problems.

Subject groups or committees are active in most clusters. They are convened by teachers to share ideas, set common question papers and share teaching aids. Subject advisors are approached for advice and may be invited to address specific issues. Responsibility for subjects is assigned to different schools in each cluster. In some clusters, subject heads have been selected to set up programmes, convene subject meetings, arrange workshops and ensure that minutes are taken and deadlines are met. They also scrutinize common test and exam papers. In most cases, principals or HODs of these schools monitor the progress of the committees and report back to the cluster management committee. Cluster centre principals send these minutes to the inspectors. To date, subject groups have focussed on primary grades and Grade 10, but they are gradually being extended to all grades. Cluster exam papers are being introduced upwards of the Grade 5 level to strengthen uniformity and standards in each subject through the senior primary and secondary phases. In Swakopmund and Walvis Bay, secondary phase mathematics and biology teachers have been conducting subject discussions for some time. Grades 11 and 12 teachers from remote schools have been meeting with Swakopmund teachers for subject discussions. Several secondary subject groups still work according to the original Life Science clusters. For example, remote secondary schools like Otjiperongo JS, Martin Luther High and Dibasen JS continue to meet since they are the only secondary schools in their clusters.

The collection and distribution of materials and statistics. Circulars and materials are now distributed to schools through clusters, although schools in urban clusters deal directly with the inspector since this is logistically more convenient. But in the more remote clusters, statistics are channelled though the cluster centre principals where they are checked. Stationery catalogues are discussed at cluster meetings and sent out to schools. Orders for stationery and textbooks are channelled through the cluster centre.

Establishment of cluster venues: A room has been reserved for cluster activities, information and materials in many schools.

The training of school boards: School board training has been provided together with translated booklets detailing the functions and responsibilities of school board members. Inspectors have

received training in this regard through Ibis funding, and will pass on this training to cluster centre principals at a BEP-funded workshop. There is a joint school board in Walvis Bay, which represents the primary and secondary clusters. It acts in an advisory capacity to all schools, giving support where needed and referring issues to the constituency advisory committee which represents the whole community.

Principals' Associations are active throughout the region, and they are still valid as they provide a forum for all principals to be represented.

Education Forums and Advisory Committees: There are two established Education Forums in the education region, one in the Erongo political region and one in the Kunene political region. In each region, constituency advisory committees are active and cluster centre principals, together with school board members and councillors, are involved in the meetings. Cluster principal representation promotes the cluster system's role in facilitating the decentralisation process.

STEPS TOWARDS ACTIVATION OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

Baseline study: The baseline study, " The development needs of schools and clusters of schools in the Khorixas Education Region" was completed in October 1999. Schools were grouped into 22 clusters arranged in 4 circuits. Some changes were made to the recommended clusters and selected cluster centres after extensive discussions. The final version was introduced to the regional governors, councillors and Education Forums of Kunene and Erongo, as well as other education organisations.

Appointment of BEP Regional Education Advisor: Mr M.J. Spangenberg was appointed in 1999 to facilitate the implementation of the cluster system.

Awareness Campaign: A sensitization campaign was undertaken for people in education, communities and for politicians:

- All school principals were informed about the system through a workshop in February 2000 and through circulars from the REO about the new system.
- Cluster centre principals were identified and had their roles made clear at a workshop in August 2000.
- The general public was made aware of the launch of the cluster system through the newspapers and over the radio.
- Once all stakeholders were fully informed about the cluster system, an official launch brought stakeholders together, and established a starting point for the implementation phase.
- Cluster meetings were started, focusing on management and administrative issues.
- Subject meetings were then initiated to upgrade education standards across clusters.
- Input into these groups was supplemented by in-service training from subject advisors. For example, lower primary facilitators were identified in each cluster for training in a NIED programme. They will then pass their skills on to other teachers in their clusters and support the Lower Primary Reform programme.

Training workshops: Workshops in computer skills, industrial relations, conflict and stress management and "train the trainer" were offered to REO staff and principals. IECD courses on management skills for principals are underway in the Kunene region, and have addressed uncertainties about the cluster system. Through a partnership between IBIS and BEP, school board training has been offered to inspectors, who have trained cluster centre principals. This training will be passed on to school boards in the clusters. A secretary's workshop has been organised for some clusters, and this idea is being taken up throughout the region. The Mathematics and Science Teachers' Education Programme (MASTEP) conducted workshops for Grade 7 subject teachers on a circuit basis.

Equipment supplied to the REO and circuit offices: A needs analysis for circuit offices and cluster centres has served as a guideline for supplies. Computers have been purchased to establish a network between the senior inspector and the circuit inspectors. Training equipment and stationery have been supplied to circuit offices, cluster centres and TRCs, to be used for staff training in clusters.

The flow of information has been maintained through contact between the REO officials and the BEP advisor. The BEP newsletter and local newspaper articles keep information flowing to all parties.

BENEFITS AND INNOVATIONS OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

Based on visits to twenty-one cluster centres, the REO and the district offices, the following information was gleaned as a combination of views and observations from all interviews. The benefits and innovations mentioned below reflect conditions in many different schools, but are not general to all clusters.

The decentralisation process is underway, with more decision-making being encouraged within clusters and circuits. For example, the Usakos cluster has made decisions on teacher recruitment, and about the rationalisation of schools regarding primary and secondary phases. The Omaruru cluster involved councillors, school board members, principals and teachers in a discussion about the rationalisation of schools, and the vote was against taking this step. The appointment of teachers remains a centralised function, but is becoming more dependent on local input.

Improved communication: Better teamwork is now evident amongst the principals in many clusters. This enlightens principals on new ways of dealing with problems, as well as giving them the realisation that they all face pressures. Channels of communication have been opened, with many principals and teachers now sharing and solving problems together. There is a good relationship between schools in most clusters, and mutual support on an informal basis is gaining momentum. The cluster management committees are proving useful as a forum for sharing ideas and supporting each other. Discussions now take place regarding teacher appointments, shortcomings at schools, needs for stationery and other resources, and the lack of places in primary schools for rural applicants. Solutions are sought within the clusters or the circuit.

Teachers now share ideas and activities on specific issues, such as reading problems because learners do not read properly when they start secondary grades. Problems, such as automatic promotion and the need for more remedial teaching, are now discussed in a team context. Problems are no longer seen in isolation, but rather as a challenge for the group. Where one school in a cluster organises a workshop, other schools in the cluster are now invited to attend. Private schools in a cluster assist with programmes, for example through a winter school for the cluster that addresses reading problems.

Workloads are heavy for cluster centre principals, as they now have additional duties, but in several cases they expressed the fact that the benefits of the system and the commitment of the cluster staff encourage them. The work is therefore construed as rewarding rather than restrictive. Teachers and principals find ways to travel to central meeting points, even in the most remote parts of the Kunene region. They feel that their skills can be improved and learners' performance will ultimately improve by sharing ideas and techniques.

The promotion of parent involvement: At cluster management meetings, educators share ideas on how to involve parents more effectively in schools, and then feed these ideas to local school boards and advisory committee meetings.

Upgrading the quality of teaching: With the exception of schools in the large coastal towns, the performance of learners is generally very poor. There is a commitment to change this situation, which

has been discussed at advisory committee meetings and cluster management committee meetings. Many people see the cluster system approach as a means of improving performance.

Subject committees have been set up to unify schemes of work and exam papers and thus ensure that all teachers meet certain standards. Different teachers in each cluster are expected to make contributions to the contents of schemes of work and common test or exam papers. Teachers no longer work in isolation, but share ideas and support each other. Common timetables are now drawn up so that all schools write exams at the same time, thus allowing for improved controls, and encouraging teachers to meet deadlines. Lower primary phase teachers compile schemes of work together, including a term and year planner, and ideas for lesson preparation. They focus on common problem areas, such as reading and special class issues. Subject heads, by organising the subject meetings, have become upgraded in skills such as taking minutes, writing reports, handling information from advisory teachers, and meeting the needs of teachers. Furthermore, primary teachers are now more aware of standards required for secondary grades through the co-ordination of primary and secondary phases in subject groups.

Advisory Services can plan more effectively: Advisory teachers have supported the establishment of subject groups in clusters, as they feel that this is an excellent way for more teachers to be reached to upgrade the quality of teaching. Each teacher is now required to contribute to aspects of each meeting, forcing the teachers to prepare and even to do a literature search regarding the topic of the meeting. Problem areas and training needs are now passed on to the inspector and the relevant subject advisor, and NIED is kept informed. Teachers in some clusters have identified needs for remedial programmes in Mathematics, English and Science, which are being worked in to a training programme for the circuit. Only major issues that cannot be resolved in the cluster are referred to the subject advisors. A programme is in the process of being developed to link advisory services with cluster activities. Records are kept of subject group topics covered, and problems encountered. Advisory teachers can now focus on assisting where there are shortfalls, and on arranging additional training for subject facilitators.

Improved administrative efficiency: The collection of statistics has become more efficient through the cluster system. Survey forms are sent to schools and then channelled back through the cluster centres, where they are checked and sent on to the inspector. Deadlines are now being met in rural areas, which was seldom the case before. Stationery and book orders are also co-ordinated and checked through cluster centres, and then collected by inspectors. In the larger urban areas, it remains more convenient for local schools to deal directly with the inspector. Publishers still distribute textbooks directly to individual schools. Documents and circulars are faxed to cluster centres where possible, and photocopied then distributed from there to satellite schools.

This system of distribution and collection has reduced the time and transport costs of inspectors, and has ensured that all schools receive and hand in paperwork in a timely fashion. Since the cluster system has added time, financial and transport burdens on cluster centres, an effort is being made to supply the centres with additional staff, such as a secretary or teacher.

Cluster centres as focal points for teamwork: The cluster centres, particularly in the rural areas, have become important channels of information. Planning issues are discussed within some cluster management committees, and recommendations are made to inspectors regarding the rationalisation of schools, the need for facilities and the language medium of instruction at primary schools. Internal arrangements are now made within circuits and clusters to solve problems. For example, the Etanga PS is a remote cluster centre with low enrolments and one teacher offering Grades 1 to 5. An agreement with another remote and overstaffed school in the cluster has allowed a second teacher to be transferred there so that it operates as a more efficient centre. Cluster centre principals now discuss the monthly reports of all principals in the cluster, and thereby identify problem areas or good ideas which are then placed on the cluster meeting agenda. The effective teamwork demonstrated by some cluster centres, through their weekly school management meetings and monthly school board meetings, has set a positive example to other schools in the clusters. Many cluster centre principals

now discuss continuous assessment marks at cluster meetings. They check on the completion of syllabuses, and discuss pass requirements and promotion requirements. They encourage other principals to make similar inputs at their schools by conducting staff meetings and class visits. Teachers even visit each other's schools for class observations to learn from each other. Isolated teachers in remote schools have particularly appreciated this approach. Peer support from the cluster is offered to new teachers in remote schools where there may not be another teacher in that subject. In some clusters, cluster letterheads and mission statements are being drafted to promote a common identity.

Planning and policy-making: In many cases, an action plan or development plan for the year is now drawn up not only for each school, but for the whole cluster. Orders for stationery, textbooks and cleaning materials are discussed at cluster management level. The problem of low budgets for equipment was made known to parents in several clusters, so that more contributions are forthcoming. The setting up of policies within the cluster now ensures that proper care is taken of equipment. For example, learners have to leave their books at school during holidays to avoid the careless handling of books. Another policy that has evolved within the cluster context prevents parents from taking their learners home before the end of a term, as this is disruptive to schools. Cluster management meetings deal with issues such as the problems of multi-grade teaching, and try to discourage councillors from pressurising for upgrades where enrolments do not justify additional teachers.

A flexible approach to the cluster system is important in order to maximise its potential. For example, schools offering secondary grades in clusters that have mainly primary schools can participate in management meetings, but join up with other secondary schools from other clusters for subject groups and common exam papers. Mobile schools, which are not officially part of the system, are being involved in cluster meetings where distances are not a major constraint. Okaukeujo PS, which is in Oshana Region and very far from other schools in its cluster joins the Outjo cluster for subject groups and sports activities.

In the Kunene region, where distances between schools in the cluster are particularly large, most of the cluster management meetings for these clusters are held at the TRC in Opuwo, which is the administrative centre of the region. Other meetings such as advisory committee meetings or IECD training sessions take place in Opuwo, and cluster meetings are scheduled to follow afterwards. Circuit meetings are held in Opuwo every trimester, and cluster centre principals arrange for common exam papers for all senior primary grades in the circuit.

Cluster activities are more diverse:

- Cluster festivals, with cultural activities as well as fund-raising aspects, are becoming popular.
- HIV/AIDS Clubs have been established in many schools, and the idea of co-ordinating these at cluster level is taking root.
- One cluster is organising an exchange programme for learners and teachers from the cluster schools to visit schools in Swakopmund to learn from the example of developed schools.
- A Maths Marathon run by volunteer teachers also involves subject groups in the cluster.
- One cluster is planning a teaching aid exhibition across the primary phase for all schools in the cluster to encourage more creativity in teaching methods.
- Training for secretaries was initiated in one cluster and then extended to three clusters using funds from the private school in the cluster. This idea will be followed elsewhere in the region.
- One cluster is developing an action plan for training to address reading problems in English, especially for teachers who do not have a good command of the language.

Fund-raising: Many clusters emphasise that cluster activities are school activities, and that school boards should therefore be agreeable to funds used for transport to meetings or to run workshops. One cluster has a cluster fund from donations made by principals and teachers, which is used for transport

to cluster meetings. Some cluster centres that have copying facilities, such as risographs or photocopiers, raise funds to maintain the machines by charging schools for their use.

Utilising resource teachers and skills in the cluster strengthens programmes such as the Lower Primary Reform programme. Excellent lower primary teachers in the cluster can be used as facilitators so that teachers in all schools can benefit. Some secondary schools have capable staff to teach computer literacy to other teachers in the cluster if funds can be raised for workshops. It is now possible to draw on expertise from within and outside of the cluster. For example, Khorixas teachers attended a mathematics workshop organised by teachers from Outjo.

Utilising a range of training programmes: The enhancement of the Lower Primary Reform programme, by training facilitators in each cluster, involves more teachers in training. IECD training makes use of the cluster system for the selection of trainees and reinforces cluster objectives by incorporating these into the training modules. School board training makes use of the inspectors as trainers. They train the principals, who in turn train their school boards.

CONSTRAINTS AND CONCERNS

These constraints and concerns represent a range of opinions and experiences expressed during interviews, but are not general to all clusters.

Is there a need for the cluster system? An urban cluster centre principal asked why a new system should be introduced artificially and without incentives to an environment where education is proceeding well. Particularly in secondary urban clusters, principals' training is not necessary, as all principals are professionally qualified and experienced. Schools are well managed and all staff members have demanding roles within their own schools. Extending management structures to include other schools has thus been a burden rather than an advantage.

Lack of consultation: As principals were never consulted about the selection of cluster centres, there is some resistance to the concept and, therefore, an ownership problem. Many stakeholders feel that they should have been involved at the decision-making stages of the project.

Workload problems: Most cluster centre principals run demanding schools, and have heavy teaching loads, as well as school administration tasks. Additional responsibilities are now being added to this load, without the necessary support or incentives. Cluster centres have applied for an extra teacher to assist with these additional tasks, but the REO has yet to respond. Some cluster centre principals feel that the cluster system will not sustainable if too many demands are placed on overloaded principals without appropriate support or incentives. Benefits of sharing and mutual support between principals and teachers can be outweighed by disadvantages if the system becomes too demanding.

School secretaries at cluster centres also have increased workloads, but many of them lack the skills required for these additional tasks. Some cluster centre principals have to assist with typing where the load is too heavy for the secretaries.

Lack of subject advisory support: One view is that subject groups should be the responsibility of subject advisors, and not an additional load on principals or busy senior teachers. A higher level of input and stimulation from subject advisors is needed in subject groups to make them worthwhile. Cluster meetings and subject meetings need to be injected with new ideas, as discussion can become limited. Shared exam papers are not enough. Teachers need more help with actual teaching skills. By using the cluster system, advisory teachers can attend one subject meeting to reach many teachers. Panel visits of several advisory teachers together, are the usual style but are not sufficiently in depth in terms of subject input.

Boundaries: Constituencies do not always coincide with cluster borders, which means that schools in one cluster can be represented on different advisory committees. A. Gariseb PS is near the border of Kunene, but is closer to schools in Erongo. This school is already part of a sports circuit with schools in the town of Khorixas. However, people would have to travel further if the Uis cluster was split.

Etoto PS is close to schools in Omusati, and their teachers do not attend cluster meetings in Opuwo because of large distances.

Communication problems: The use of telephones and fax machines to do cluster business is limited by small budgets, and meetings are difficult to arrange where schools are remote and have no telephone.

Transport and communication are major problems in the remote parts of Kunene. Large distances between schools have prevented meetings from being held regularly in some cases. Sending circulars to satellite schools has become a problem for cluster centre principals as they first have to be fetched at the Opuwo District Office, then photocopied in Opuwo, and then sent to the schools if someone is going that way. All photocopying of shared exam papers has to be done in Opuwo, and then distributed from there to the schools. The donkey is the fastest form of transport from Otjitanda JP to the cluster centre at Etanga.

Fund-raising problems: The costs of transport to attend meetings have become an additional expense for more distant schools, and these schools are mostly based in poor communities where school funds are limited. School boards often query the justification for using school funds for cluster activities, such as photocopies for subject groups. The photocopiers at some centres are heavily used because question papers for all schools are copied, but the schools in the cluster do not pay for the use and maintenance of the machines. Cluster centre principals pay their own costs when visiting schools, which may not be a sustainable arrangement. Where training needs have been identified in clusters, there are usually problems financing training workshops.

Levels of responsibility: The delegation of authority to inspectors and cluster centre principals remains limited. Too many final decisions are referred back to higher levels. Many activities are still centralised although the potential exists to delegate this decision-making, and there is uncertainty about the extent to which decisions can be made at cluster level. For example, internal arrangements for workshops and other activities are made tentatively without knowing if the cluster management committee has the authority to make such decisions. Permission is still requested from REO, instead of the inspector being informed and simply giving authority. Regional management has not supported initiatives such as the joint school board for Swakopmund. This leaves stakeholders uncertain on how far they can take their decisions. Many cluster centre principals have expressed a need for clarity on their functions those of cluster and circuit management structures. Some remote clusters in the Kunene region, such as Etanga cluster and Otjondeka cluster are not active, and have expressed uncertainty regarding the implementation process.

The planning of physical facilities is still done in a centralised way by planners and does not involve cluster consultations. Planning for curricula and subject choices is not done in a cluster-based manner with the needs of the cluster in mind, as should be the case.

Inspectors remain burdened because their time is largely taken up by IECD and BETD course co-ordination and various workshops, and they are still required to intervene in individual problems at schools, rather than delegating this to the cluster management committees. The rural clusters are focussing more on management issues rather than the quality of teaching. In urban clusters, there is a different emphasis, more on personnel development, and the establishment of subject groups, rather than administrative issues. Inspectors have expressed frustration at the lack of time they have to really promote and use the potential of the cluster system.

Two inspectors' posts are not yet properly filled. The post in Omaruru was vacant until July 2001, and was managed by the senior inspector. The building of an inspector's office and a TRC in Omaruru is being investigated. An acting inspector competently filled the post in Opuwo. A new inspector was recently appointed to the post but has not assumed duties because local people have not agreed with the appointment. The uncertainty around these two posts hampers progress in the circuit.

Attitude problems: Lower primary facilitators are being selected for training by NIED and they will then offer workshops to all lower primary teachers. However, conflicts between some teachers have resulted in a lack of respect for the subject facilitators. Teachers and even subject heads do not always attend subject meetings. Principals have not yet taken responsibility for monitoring this problem. In remote areas there are some unmotivated principals who hinder the problem-solving process as they lack the skills to effectively manage cluster meetings.

There was not enough explanation of the cluster system initially, and many stakeholders were unclear about their functions and those of the cluster centre. Where there is disagreement or lack of understanding, those schools do not co-operate with cluster decisions. Excuses are made for poor attendance, such as large distances. Some teachers feel inadequate when working with dynamic teachers, and therefore resist attending meetings. Co-operation from teachers is a problem where the satellite school managers are negative towards the cluster centre. A need for input from outside was expressed to resolve the lack of co-operation from satellite principals in the Kamanjab cluster.

Efficiency problems: Not all ordered textbooks and stationery have been received by remote schools, which indicates that the decentralised distribution system may not yet be effective as it could be. Textbooks are supposed to be delivered directly to schools, and other materials to the district offices, from where they are further distributed by cluster centre principals.

Problems of facilities: Most schools in the urban areas are well endowed with facilities, but in remote areas there is insufficient storage space and space for cluster meetings at many cluster centres. Several remote schools lack toilet facilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The BEP has played a key role in implementing the cluster system in the Khorixas region. Most of the clusters are functional and meet actively to discuss management and subject issues. The benefits of BEP support are clear, and this support should be developed and enhanced as the project moves from the present phase of implementation to focus more on efficiency and quality in education. Certain needs should be addressed, however, and the following requirements were identified during interviews with inspectors and cluster centre principals:

- There is an urgent need for clarification on decision-making powers of inspectors and cluster management committees. Greater authority and responsibility should be delegated by the REO to inspectors and clusters. It is recommended that the REO follow the example of Katima Mulilo in this respect.
- Greater formal involvement of cluster centre principals at circuit management level is necessary.
- Development plans for the clusters need to be compiled, especially for human resource development.
- Assistance with copying facilities at central points would enable question papers to be shared more efficiently.
- An increased allocation of telephone and fax machines is essential to cluster centres.
- More in-service training is needed, especially in the rural areas.
- There is a need for team building at all levels of management, as collaboration and consultation skills need to be improved.

- Training courses are necessary to develop the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the cluster system, especially for principals, HODs, secretaries and school boards. A training module on the cluster system and its potential applications would be useful. There is an expressed need for a manual detailing the pertinent facts about the cluster approach.
- Inspectors should have the authority and budgets to organise training for their circuits.
- There is an expressed need for professional input from the advisory services into issues such as the teaching of Maths and English, and the switch from mother tongue medium of instruction to English at the lower primary level.
- The BEP advisor and the local inspector should intervene actively to resolve the problem of cluster centres not being active, as is the case in some clusters in the Kunene region. They should either change the cluster or counsel the stakeholders in the cluster.
- Changes to cluster centres should quickly be recognised as permanent by the REO to provide continuity in the cluster. For example, Braunfels College took over the Khorixas secondary cluster when the need arose, but now needs official recognition to really commit to the demands of the position.
- Certain changes should be considered as a result of the great distances between some schools in clusters in the Kunene region, and the establishment of a number of mobile schools near MBESC schools. For example, the Okanguati cluster could be split three ways as mobile schools become more established and need to participate in cluster activities. Okanguati CS could take in the nearby mobile schools and form a new cluster, and Ehomba PS could do the same. Ruiters PS could be incorporated into the Opuwo cluster. The remote cluster of Etanga should have close links to the Opuwo cluster, as resources in this cluster are extremely limited. The same applies to Okanguati and Ehomba clusters. Combined meetings in Opuwo, involving teachers and principals from these clusters, should be encouraged.

Recommendations concerning mobile schools:
Twenty-six "mobile" schools have been established in the remote areas of the Kunene region. Few of them are actually mobile, especially as there have been several good years of rain and the communities have become more sedentary. Some of these schools even have permanent structures. Teachers come in to Opuwo every month for upgrading workshops, as they are all studying ISC or BETD. Some schools are within range of cluster centres and are becoming involved in cluster activities, especially in subject groups. Access to storage facilities at cluster centres would be of great assistance in helping NAMAS's efforts to distribute maize and teaching materials to these remote schools. In general, there is good co-operation from the Ovahimba communities due to the thorough groundwork and feasibility studies undertaken by NAMAS before the schools were established. Many parents prefer to support mobile schools because they fit in with their traditions. This sentiment has perhaps caused enrolments to drop at MBESC schools, most of which have mobile schools nearby. These factors should be investigated so as to provide the most suitable educational environment to the children in remote communities. In particular, the reasons for declining enrolments in MBESC schools should be investigated as several of these schools are becoming non-viable. Also, the long-term plans for the mobile schools need to be formulated to provide continuity in education for the communities that these schools serve.

KEETMANSHOOP EDUCATION REGION

SUMMARY

The clustering process started in the Keetmanshoop region with a baseline study in 1999, and clusters were established in 2000. A team of selected regional officials and the BEP advisor initiated an awareness campaign in the region. The BEP advisor passed away at an early stage and this post remains vacant. However, the BEP team together with inspectors continued to encourage the implementation of the cluster system, and many clusters are active. Active clusters have established cluster management committees as well as subject committees. In the rural areas, cluster management committees are not as well supported as subject committees, which seem to help in upgrading teaching skills through a supportive team approach. Advisory Services actively use the cluster system, especially to train facilitators for Lower Primary Reform. TRCs are involved in promoting cluster activities. A more efficient system of distributing information and materials through the clusters is gradually taking shape, especially in rural areas. However, ownership of the cluster system is not yet evident throughout the region. Insufficient groundwork has been done to convince all stakeholders of the worth of the system. The roles of various stakeholders in the system have also not been clarified. Cluster centre principals are not formally involved at the level of circuit management, nor have decision-making powers been delegated to them. The many benefits of clusters already evident should serve to motivate the activation of the cluster system throughout the region. The appointment of a BEP Advisor, together with more commitment and support from the REO and the inspectorate, is required to ensure the activation of the cluster system throughout the region.

map

REGIONAL EDUCATION MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

The baseline study was completed in November 1999 and structures were then put in place to facilitate the use of the cluster system. A regional BEP team was established to promote the implementation of the cluster system. This team comprises the regional education officer, the regional education planner, all circuit inspectors and the principal advisory teacher. The BEP regional education advisor died some months after he occupied the post, and a new appointment should be made by end of 2001. Momentum has been slowed by the lack of a full-time advisor, with the result that only certain clusters are actively implementing the cluster system. Circuit offices are already established in Keetmanshoop, Rehoboth and Mariental. Two inspectors are based in Rehoboth, one in Mariental and two in Keetmanshoop.

Cluster Management Committees: Where the clusters are active, cluster management committees are composed of the cluster centre principals as chairpersons, school principals from each cluster and other co-opted members such as senior school management from schools in the cluster. Meetings are held once or twice a trimester. Some clusters have opted to hold meetings on a rotational basis at the different schools in the cluster, chaired by the principal of the host school. In other clusters, the cluster centre principal co-ordinates cluster meetings and arranges for minutes to be distributed to schools. Issues are discussed and solved at this level, where possible.

Subject groups: Active structures for Lower Primary Reform have been set up within the cluster context throughout the region. The focus is now on the involvement of the senior primary phase in subject groups. These groups are developing common schemes of work and question papers in all subjects for Grades 5 to 7. Grade 7 learners write a mock exam in August to prepare them for the national exam. This exam is set and written in the cluster context. Subject facilitators are nominated from within the cluster for each promotion subject. Principals take responsibility for different subject groups, and report back at cluster management committee meetings.

Subject facilitators have been in place for some years in urban areas, and have been trained at NIED. The TRC managers participate in subject meetings, and assist with the procurement of materials.

Each secondary school in Rehoboth has a co-ordinator for each subject. Meetings are set up to organise common exam papers. Question papers are sent to the cluster centre where they are checked by the HODs and then typed. Each school duplicates the papers its needs.

Cluster centres are distribution points for circulars and statistical forms. They also serve as central points for gathering information for inspectors regarding the status of subject groups, summaries of school visits and cluster committee meetings.

Links between education groups: The primary and secondary clusters in Rehoboth meet at the Rehoboth Headmasters' Association. This forum provides a useful link between the phases. At Mariental and Keetmanshoop, principals from the primary and secondary phases meet at Principals' Association meetings to discuss common points of interest such as sports and policy issues.

The cluster system is linked to decentralisation structures in the region, especially the advisory committees that have been set up in each constituency. These are composed of cluster centre principals, school board members, inspectors, regional councillors and additional principals from outlying areas. The Education Forum in each political region consists of one principal elected from each advisory committee, as well as councillors, school board members and inspectors.

School visits: Many cluster centre principals undertake school visits to share ideas and identify problems. The cluster centre principal from the Mariental Secondary cluster gave presentations on Grade 8 and 11 study fields to secondary and feeder schools.

Advisory services support cluster activities and are actively involved in implementing the cluster system. TRCs provide venues for meetings.

STEPS TOWARDS ACTIVATION OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

Baseline study: The baseline study " The development needs of schools and clusters of schools in the Keetmanshoop Education Region" was completed in November 1999. Schools were grouped into 20 clusters, divided between the 5 circuits of the region. Some changes have since been made to clusters and selected cluster centres to maximise accessibility and to ensure that the selected principals are indeed the capable.

Appointment of BEP Regional Education Advisor: Mr D. Slaverse was appointed in 1999 to facilitate the implementation of the cluster system, but he unfortunately passed away after a short time. The position is still vacant.

Awareness Campaign: Sensitisation to the project was conducted in three phases:

- The BEP advisor and the inspectors visited thirteen venues to explain aspects of the new cluster system. School principals and other stakeholders were informed of the process through workshops and the media.
- The REO staff members were also invited to explanatory workshops.
- The regional governors, councillors and members of the educational forums of Karas and Hardap were informed of the process.

Training workshops: Workshops in industrial relations, conflict and stress management and on how to train other trainers, were offered to REO staff and principals. IECD courses on management skills for principals are underway, and have addressed uncertainties about the cluster system. School boards are currently receiving training throughout the region.

Equipment supplied to the REO and circuit offices: Computers with Internet connections have been supplied to the REO and district offices by the BEP. Training equipment and stationery have been supplied to circuit offices to be used for staff training in clusters. A Volkswagen bus has been allocated by the BEP to the region for use in all circuits. Building material was donated for the renovation of the Keetmanshoop TRC.

BENEFITS AND INNOVATIONS OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

We visited and interviewed people at the fifteen cluster centres in the region, as well as at the REO and the two district offices. The overview presented below is based on observations made and views expressed during these interviews. The benefits and innovations mentioned below therefore apply to many different schools and sources but not necessarily to all clusters in the region.

Professional development: In the rural areas especially, there has been a particularly positive response to subject committees. There is an expressed need for the upgrading of teaching skills, and the team teaching approach is providing this need in many cases. Lower Primary Reform has become more entrenched through the cluster system. Cluster representatives have attended workshops on Lower Primary Reform and they have given feedback to the other teachers through the cluster system.

Learner-centred teaching concepts and techniques are discussed and shared when teachers interact, especially as more recently qualified teachers bring new ideas to the notice of more traditionally trained teachers.

In urban areas, where, for example, reading problems at disadvantaged schools are an issue, teachers have been invited to bring struggling learners to cluster centres for extra lessons. This has mainly happened at the senior primary level to ensure that they are prepared for the secondary phase. Subject advisors give their input at schools, problem-solving and setting goals for individual teachers as well as for groups of teachers at subject meetings. Feedback from teachers is greatly encouraged. Subject teachers within the clusters are working together as teams, with subject heads appointed within the clusters. The REO provides funds for the subject heads to attend workshops where training is offered by subject advisors in the circuits.

TRCs are used as bases for cluster activities in Mariental and Karasburg especially, and all TRCs are involved in promoting cluster activities.

Co-operation and sharing: Unified schemes of work and common question papers have helped to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers have been drawn together to share problems and ideas where previously they were isolated. Teachers from the primary and secondary phases now co-operate in setting standards to be reached for the transition from primary to secondary grades. This awareness helps close the gap in the standards between these phases, especially in the languages.

Principals are more supportive of each other as they share ideas and problems and meet regularly. Cluster centre principals can more easily identify problems as they now have regular contact with schools in the cluster, and then create ways to address such problems. Remote schools that are part of urban clusters benefit by being directly involved in cluster meetings. Problems, such as financial management and disciplinary issues, are discussed and solutions are worked out. Teamwork has been promoted within schools where senior staff members take more responsibility if principals are involved in activities away from their schools. Several outlying schools have linked up with more developed urban schools in their circuits and are receiving advice and support as "partner" schools.

Cluster centres as distribution points: A more efficient system of distributing information and materials is gradually taking shape, especially in rural areas.

Training: Inspectors now take more responsibility for the training of principals by developing materials, giving in-service training, and offering induction for new principals. School board training involves inspectors who pass their skills on to principals, together with booklets in local languages for school board members.

A flexible approach to the cluster system: In several rural clusters, only one school within a cluster offers secondary subjects. Such schools are encouraged to link up with other secondary schools in their circuits, and a level of secondary school clustering is developing, for example:

- WJD Cloete CS in Rietoog is a rural school which offers secondary subjects. It joins the Rehoboth secondary cluster for subject group meetings. Secondary teachers from other rural schools in the circuit at Schlip and Duineveld also meet.
- Rooiduin JS in Aranos joins the Mariental secondary cluster for secondary subject meetings, which helps standards to be upgraded in this remote secondary school. It joins its local Aranos cluster for more general issues, such as setting standards between primary and secondary grades.
- Schools offering secondary grades in Bethanie, Tses and Berseba join the Keetmanshoop secondary cluster for subject group meetings.

Greater flexibility in the running of cluster system activities was suggested by one of the urban clusters. The idea is to avoid a fixed structure of regular meetings and activities, which is difficult to accommodate in already busy urban clusters. There could be an informal support structure, where a network of principals and teachers within a designated cluster work out initial policies. Problems

could be referred to the network when they arise. Otherwise there would only be occasional well-planned meetings so that members feel that this is a worthwhile effort.

Cluster system applications: Several novel applications were reported. A choir festival for the cluster promoted teamwork and generated funds. A cluster committee was formed to discuss whether P.I.Groenwald PS in Gochas should offer junior secondary grades. A breakfast function for the management of a cluster set the stage for improved co-operation. An education fair, based on the cluster system, was held within clusters to promote awareness of the potential applications of the system. Teachers and learners presented some of the best work selected from clusters and circuits, and new methods and ideas were shared.

Cluster funds have been established in some clusters to meet the increased photocopying and transport costs that are incurred in clusters. One approach was to get each learner in the cluster to donate $1 per term to the cluster fund. A teachers' choir from Rietoog cluster performed to raise funds for the cluster fund. Using cluster funds, principals have arranged localised workshops to deal with such issues as financial management.

Common cluster structures: In the Aranos cluster, a joint school inventory, filing system and set of disciplinary procedures was implemented. A bank of questions with model answers was also created for each subject group to use in setting exam papers. To ensure continual updating of the bank of questions, each school in turn presents questions at a subject meeting, and these are added to the bank of questions. The exchange of ideas enriches the teachers and ultimately the learners. Invigilation and moderation duties are shared within the cluster to achieve greater objectivity. A competition for the design of a cluster letterhead was held, raising awareness and interest in the system. The Aranos cluster has also proposed to upgrade the public library, with the creation of a cluster resource centre as a specific focus in the project. This initiative would benefit the cluster as well as the community at large.

Cluster-based teaching posts: The Aranos cluster has applied for a Basic Information Science teacher for the whole cluster, as none of the schools qualify for such a post due to low enrolments. Such a teacher would be employed as a cluster teacher, teaching classes at all the cluster schools.

Annual programmes: Cluster activities are established as priorities as a result of planning ahead. The Keetmanshoop secondary cluster drafts a skeleton plan for the year ahead, and each school uses the framework to plan individual school activities. All schools are aware of cluster management meetings, subject meetings and other cluster activities. Problems experienced within the system are analysed and improvements suggested and noted down at a final annual meeting.

Parental involvement: In the Rietoog cluster, parents have catered for lunch at teachers' functions, and the school development funds have paid the transport costs for distant schools. A mini-resource centre was constructed at the cluster centre, using parent labour to alter the staff room to accommodate the centre.

Joint school boards in clusters keep parents informed of common disciplinary procedures and other common policies, including the training of school board members. Problems such as automatic promotion have been dealt with in the cluster setting, and it was decided that parents would be sent letters informing them, if their children were required to repeat the year.

Workload alleviation: Workloads are kept down to manageable levels by rotating meetings and by delegating the duties of cluster principals and subject facilitators. An unexpected spin-off of this policy is that teachers are able to develop managerial skills while executing the duties delegated to them.

Induction of new teachers is done as a cluster exercise in some clusters, with a competent teacher from a school in the cluster taking responsibility for the induction. This may be done through

informative discussions, lesson presentations and by assisting less qualified teachers with their practical work.

Incorporation of other programmes: IECD workshops are being conducted within the clusters in the Rehoboth circuits. Funding is being sought to extend these workshops to other circuits as they offer effective management training to teachers and principals. These courses also enhance the establishment of the cluster system by encouraging cluster activities.

An innovative approach to the duties of principals in cluster management: In the Keetmanshoop secondary cluster, each of the three urban principals is responsible for a different aspect of cluster functioning. A detailed example follows:

- **Administrative management:** The cluster centre principal is responsible for promoting co-operation between schools, distributing information, reporting back to principals on developments, co-ordinating training in the cluster, arranging cluster meetings, submitting reports to the inspector, and implementing ministerial policies.

  In terms of school administration, the cluster centre principal assists principals in the cluster with school administration, co-ordinating support for principals with needs in administrative skills, sharing expertise with all cluster schools regarding financial management, budgeting and bookkeeping, as well as development and maintenance of infrastructure and facilities.

  The cluster centre principal promotes discussion on topics such as socio-economic issues, educational development, and strives for uniform policies in the cluster regarding discipline, admission and transfer of learners, procedures to deal with problems in schools, and ways of encouraging cultural programmes. The principal ensures the feedback of relevant information to the Education Forum. Cluster centres keep a central data bank that is updated annually with information from all cluster schools. This lists the names of senior staff members and their duties, names of school board members, subject heads, sport organisers, policies of schools, fields of study, enrolments and learner: teacher ratios.

- **Academic management:** One cluster school is responsible for promoting academic excellence by sharing subject knowledge with cluster schools and guiding them in the use of materials and resources. This principal is also tasked with promoting a culture of sharing throughout the cluster to strengthen the performance of all schools, managing and co-ordinating subject facilitators and ensuring that subject meetings take place regularly. The training of teachers is promoted with the assistance of subject facilitators and subject advisors. Common examinations are written to control standards, and examination files, with records of question papers and results, are developed in all schools.

- **Sport management:** Another cluster school is responsible for promoting active sport administration by planning activities with sport administrators in the cluster. This principal also co-ordinates the use and sharing of facilities in the cluster, facilitates cost effectiveness in maintaining sport facilities, assists in identifying and addressing sport needs, addresses training needs and the development of coaching in the cluster.

CONSTRAINTS AND CONCERNS

The concerns described below do not apply to all clusters, but represent points raised by a range of people during interviews in the region.

Adequate ownership and development of the cluster system is not evident throughout the region. Insufficient groundwork has been done to convince all stakeholders of the worth of the system. Cluster management meetings are less established than subject meetings because the latter may meet a greater need, especially in rural areas. There is a lack of clarity on the roles of the various stakeholders in the system. Some cluster centre principals feel that they do not have the authority to identify and deal with problems, and that the inspector should still do this. Furthermore, where strong support from the principal of a school is lacking, teachers may not comply with the requirements of cluster meetings, nor observe the times set for meetings. In many clusters the spirit of collaboration and co-operation is weak and needs to be developed.

The role of inspectors within the cluster system is not yet well defined. Their workload allows them limited time to facilitate the implementation of the cluster system. Consequently, the emphasis has remained on the administrative duties of cluster centre principals and satellite principals, rather than extending to management, financial and personnel issues.

Distances between schools: In some rural clusters, distances between schools range from 30 to 60 kilometres, making it difficult to have regular meetings. Transport is an issue even within urban clusters, where one school may be a distance away from others that are located in the town. The problem of distances is exacerbated by the fact that inspectors are based only in Rehoboth, Mariental and Keetmanshoop. However, as more powers are delegated to cluster centres, inspectors should only need to travel to deal with issues which fall outside the capabilities of cluster committees.

Financial constraints: In poor rural communities, telephone and transport costs are high, but school development funds are limited. Principals and teachers develop a resistance to the system because they have to finance their own transport to cluster meetings. Photocopying is essential to ensure that schools are informed and up to date on issues, yet the considerable expenses involved often have to be borne by the cluster centre. The costs of duplicating common question papers can sometimes not be met. Some school management teams and school boards complain about the high costs of cluster activities falling on the cluster centres, and negative attitudes develop as a result of this burden. Although the TRCs are supposed to assist with logistics and equipment, this does not happen enough. A solution must be found for this problem.

Communication problems: The success of the cluster system depends on communication, but telephone allowances are low, and in some cases school telephone accounts have been so high that they have been suspended by the REO. Some remote villages do not have telephone lines or a post office. Fax machines are essential at cluster centres in these areas, at least to receive information from the circuit office and then distribute it to cluster schools.

Phase problems: In clusters consisting of a number of primary schools coupled with a single secondary school (as the cluster centre), school management and administration are the only common issues. For example, the cluster centre in Schlip is the only secondary school in the cluster, and it has not arranged cluster meetings. The primary schools feel that important meeting opportunities are lost, and they request that meetings take place between primary schools.

Workload problems: Higher workloads and extra costs are imposed on cluster centre principals, but they receive little additional recognition. Urban schools are already under pressure, and feel they need extra staff to assist with the additional cluster activities. Many cluster centre principals and subject facilitators have demanding teaching loads. Cluster centre principals are also responsible for considerable administrative tasks, extra-mural activities and staff development programmes. The

planning and scheduling of cluster activities has to be handled in such a way that additional pressure is not placed on busy teachers.

The more sophisticated the schools are, the less willing they are to take on more time-consuming tasks. They feel that they are coping adequately and that they have already imposed demanding workloads on their staff to maintain high standards. Cluster activities have become an extra burden for overloaded teachers who already attend school subject meetings, and have extra-mural obligations. Teachers in a subject group often find it difficult to arrange meetings due to a lack of time or transport. These logistical problems are impeding progress.

Subject facilitators, who already have demanding teaching loads, are expected to go for training and then feed the information back to the subject teachers. However, time constraints make this difficult. Some urban clusters have found that where subject meetings lack definite structure, there is little progress, and teachers feel that they are wasting their time.

Attitude problems: In urban clusters, the secondary schools are well-established schools where management in most cases feels that schools can deal with their own problems. The cluster management meetings are therefore not necessarily perceived as useful and attendance is poor. Some urban cluster centre principals feel somewhat intimidated by the fact that there are principals in the clusters who are better managers than they are. In some cases, there is a lack of commitment to working together, compounded by the fact that schools traditionally compete with each other academically and may therefore be reluctant to share ideas. In general, urban schools feel self-sufficient and do not believe that they will benefit from sharing with schools that have lower standards. They usually have good facilities and enough resources, and tend to focus on their own development rather than on the broader vision of developing the cluster.

Rural schools, which have operated in isolation in the past, see that there is a need to upgrade their standards and are more positive about the team approach. However, in clusters where large distances have to be covered and where travelling expenses quickly mount up, principals do not see the value of attending cluster management meetings. They do, however, encourage their teachers to attend subject meetings as those are regarded as being more important for the improvement of standards and teaching skills.

Some principals admit to feeling threatened by the school visits and having to give input at meetings, and therefore resist involvement in cluster activities. Some teachers take advantage of subject meetings, getting schemes of work and common exam papers by allowing others to do the work. This has resulted in changes in the running of subject meetings so that all teachers are required to contribute to the work of subject meetings.

Project support: Although the basic concepts of the cluster system were introduced, there has been no follow-up since the BEP advisor died. Impetus has been lost. The lack of clear guidelines on roles and functions has resulted in confusion and resistance to the system. In addition, false expectations were raised, especially about the kind of support that would be forthcoming from the BEP. Some people felt that BEP introduced the system without making provision for the extra costs incurred, which individuals are now expected to carry. This has led to frustration and negative perceptions.

Institutional support: The cluster system has been hampered by limited support from the REO and by government cutbacks. The commitment to the system needs to come from the REO, but few REO officials use the cluster structure. The BEP, REO and the inspectors have not developed a strategy to use the system to its full potential. Cluster centre principals were asked by the BEP to specify the critical needs of the cluster centres, and the needs of teachers and learners. However, BEP has not responded to these requests. Some of the needs included computers and stationery to be used for administrative purposes or by learners, storage rooms for cluster centres, and assistance with textbooks and furniture, which are in short supply.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that some clusters are functioning well, but others need a great deal of input to get them functioning. The focus should therefore remain on effective establishment of the clusters and their structures. At the same time, clusters that are already functioning well should be encouraged to continue to develop their focus on efficiency and quality in education.

During interviews with inspectors, cluster centre principals and REO officials, the following needs were identified if the cluster system is to be consolidated as an innovative and effective management tool in the region:

- Having a BEP regional advisor in place is important. There have been many questions about cluster issues that have remained unanswered. The key role of BEP in linking cluster and circuit issues and pointing them out to the REO needs to be established.
- An increased degree of commitment and support from REO and the inspectorate will encourage greater ownership of the system amongst stakeholders in the clusters. If momentum is to be maintained, all inspectors and cluster centre principals need to persevere and sacrifice the time required to make the cluster system work.
- The REO together with the inspectorate should introduce firm management structures at circuit management and cluster management levels. Duties for each level should be clearly defined and then delegated as far down the ladder of organisational responsibility as possible.
- Equipment and adequate stationery is needed in all circuit offices and cluster centres to facilitate the planning and running of cluster meetings. So far, the inspectors have received pin boards and writing materials, and all schools have been allocated photocopy paper by BEP, which the inspectors are supposed to have distributed.
- There remains a lack of clarity in many clusters about the roles of inspectors, advisory teachers, cluster centre principals and school principals. A workshop dealing with these roles is needed, together with clear direction from the REO on levels of delegated authority.
- In-service training, especially in the rural areas, should receive BEP support. There is also a need for team building at all levels of management, as collaboration and consultation skills need to be improved.
- Telephone allocations need to be increased and fax machines supplied to all cluster centres. The growing town of Lüderitz has requested a TRC. There are four schools at Lüderitz, with a fifth school at Aus, which completes the cluster. The schools are too far away from any other resource centre, and need their own facilities. It may be more appropriate to develop a well-equipped resource centre at the cluster centre rather than in the town itself.

ONDANGWA EAST AND WEST EDUCATION REGIONS

Steps to implement the cluster system in Ondangwa East and West regions were initiated in May 2000 when the Regional Directors of the Ondangwa East and West education regions requested the Basic Education Support Project (BES II) to support a study recommending the formation of clusters. The formal study began in September 2000. The study was divided into four stages, each covering one political region in each education region. Ohangwena and Oshikoto are the two political regions in the Ondangwa East education region, and Omusati and Oshana are the two political regions covered in the Ondangwa West education region.

Several rounds of consultative meetings were held with inspectors, senior inspectors, education planners and members of the regional councils. The involvement of members of the regional councils together with educators was important so that common agreement and wide acceptance of the proposals could be obtained. Members of the regional councils showed a great deal of interest and commitment during the clustering exercise.

Separate reports were compiled for the four political regions, as well as combined reports for the two education regions. These reports were finalised in July 2001 and presented to stakeholders in the region, including the regional directors and their REO staff, inspectors, selected school principals, regional councillors and governors. Regional management teams and inspectors in the two regions will now start to implement the clusters, hopefully with the support of the BES II project. Strong emphasis should be placed on learning from the experiences, both positive and negative, of the four regions that have already implemented the cluster system.

WINDHOEK EDUCATION REGION

The Regional Director of the Windhoek Education Region has requested the BEP to support a baseline study to establish a cluster system, which will commence early in 2002. The study will entail the use of maps, education statistics, together with broad consultation with REO staff, inspectors, selected principals and regional councillors throughout the region. Schools will be grouped into clusters according to geographical considerations and accessibility to each other. Cluster centres will be selected, firstly according to their accessibility to other schools in the cluster, secondly according to the facilities and resources that they can offer, and thirdly according to the management strengths of the existing principal. The assumption has to be made that the REO will be committed to appointing the most suitable principals at cluster centre schools if the existing principals are not suited to these positions, as they are pivotal to the success of the cluster system. Clusters will, in turn, be grouped into circuits, again through a process of consultation. The BEP will support the implementation process, and all stakeholders will be encouraged to draw on the experiences of the regions that have already implemented the system.

Chapter 3

SCHOOL CLUSTERS IN RELATION TO BEP ACTIVITIES

The Basic Education Project (BEP) was designed to achieve a sustainable improvement in the provision and quality of basic education by developing and applying a systems-related approach. Since its inception in 1995 in the Rundu region, the project initiated a range of activities and programmes to implement and develop the school cluster system. Through its activities in the four target regions, the project has begun to move from a position of helping to initiate the cluster system to a process of improving and extending the system.

To do this, the BEP has pursued the following major activities:

- Encouraging the decentralisation of education by promoting the establishment and equipping of circuit offices for inspectors and advisory teachers;
- Establishing and supporting school clusters;
- Providing training to inspectors and cluster centre principals on management and community outreach skills;
- Offering ongoing logistical and professional support to circuit offices and cluster centres to promote quality education in the region, and to maximise the utilisation of the cluster system;
- Linking and highlighting cluster and circuit issues to the REO;
- Supporting the activities of the REO through workshops;
- Supporting regional working groups in follow-up training for Lower Primary Reform in co-operation with NIED;
- Supporting school board training to enhance community and parental involvement.

BEP has a system of objectives, monitoring and evaluating project performance. Each objective is called a Result, the first three of which relate to school clusters. The Rundu region was the first target area for the implementation of the cluster system. As a consequence, the monitoring and evaluation system developed for the BEP bases many of the indicators on the progress made in that region. The irony is that while the Rundu region had a good head start, and many structures were effectively set in place, the momentum in the region has been lost in the wake of the instability in the region. Some of the loss in momentum is also attributable to a sense of apathy among the key stakeholders in the cluster process, at REO and circuit levels in Rundu.

According to this system of objectives, Result 1 refers to the Rundu education region as follows: "Based on the decentralisation processes, the school cluster system in the Rundu region is institutionalised and the efficiency and quality of administration and education services are further strengthened." It would be fair to conclude, based on the findings of this review, that efficiency in administration services has improved in the Rundu region (see page 10). The collection of statistics and the distribution of materials have become more efficient due to the use of the cluster system. In-service teacher training has also improved, and many remotely placed teachers are now being trained through the clusters. The quality of education services is being promoted by the common examinations being held within circuits, as this requires teachers to synchronise their progress through the syllabuses. However, in terms of institutionalisation, there appears to be insufficient commitment by REO officials and inspectors to really promote the system to its full potential. The lack of ownership is apparent at the cluster level as well, which raises the question of sustainability. In a more positive light, even the limited application of the system has shown positive results, which indicates that there

is a basic interest in the system and that the region will get on track once again once the security situation is resolved.

Results 2 and 3 for BEP refer to the Katima Mulilo, Keetmanshoop and Khorixas regions. These are as follows: “Based on the school cluster systems, planning and management of education services are more efficient” (Result 2) and “School development and management are strengthened by active partnership with communities and parents.” (Result 3) In all three of these regions, progress towards these goals has been positive. The lack of a BEP project co-ordinator in the Keetmanshoop region has resulted in a lack of clarity about the functioning of the system there, but the cluster structures are in place in most circuits region (see page 44). Some clusters are particularly active and they have shown progress in improving the efficiency and quality of education services. However, in terms of consolidation, the regional management and circuit management levels are poorly committed to the cluster system at this point, and it is far from being used to its maximum potential. School board training has been introduced within the cluster framework, which will eventually strengthen Result 3.

The Katima Mulilo and Khorixas and regions are more advanced in terms of the ownership, consolidation and sustainability of the system region (see pages 19 and 33). The cluster structures in both regions are well established. Administrative services are more efficient through the cluster system. The quality of teaching is being improved through active, cluster-based subject and examination committees throughout these regions. School board training is in process in both regions through the cluster system structures, and indications are that parents are already more involved in school activities in many clusters. In these two regions, a great deal of positive feedback was noted during the review, although this was tempered by concerns of high workloads and large distances between schools, especially in the Khorixas region. On the whole, teachers and principals in these regions are taking the cluster system seriously, and in most cases a sense of ownership of the system is evident. A phase of consolidation is now underway in both regions, with only isolated cases of apathy or resistance to the system.

In terms of institutionalisation, the Katima Mulilo region has taken the resourceful step of shifting the management focus of the region from centralised decision-making to a decentralised participatory management style. Well-entrenched circuit and cluster management committees empower inspectors and principals by providing the mechanisms through which they can make their own decisions. The well-informed implementation of these decentralised structures and functions has had a very positive knock-on effect on many of the administrative and educational services in the region.

Chapter 4

APPLICATIONS OF THE SCHOOL CLUSTER SYSTEM

The review of clusters presented in Chapter 2 revealed a range of activities, applications and benefits of the cluster system. These are referred to below, but several general conclusions need to be drawn at the outset.

Firstly, it is clear that some schools have benefited and can take advantage of the cluster system more than other schools. Those that benefit most are the ones that are in greatest need of support of a variety of kinds: for management purposes, teaching practices and examination requirements, and accurate and timely information. Other schools, especially some of the large schools in urban areas, do not require such support to the same degree. Those larger, urban schools may perceive the cluster system as more of an additional work load than as being of any advantage. This needs to be recognised for the future, but it is also clear that many of the well-established urban schools can provide useful leadership for those schools that need support.

Secondly, the cluster system is being used for a great variety of purposes. This comes as something of a surprise because it was conceived as having fairly specific uses. Clusters first developed as a way of improving access, especially where there was a need for higher grades within a group of schools that only offered lower grades. Uses of clusters to improve the management then became apparent and efforts were accordingly made to develop better communication, supervision and training. Finally, teachers and principals have used clusters to improve teaching and learning practices.

Thirdly, in the light of the many uses of clusters, it is clear that clusters should be used in a flexible manner. Such flexibility will enable schools to use the system to their greatest advantage, emphasizing those aspects that work best for them and leaving aside applications that have little benefit.

Fourthly, the cluster system can be of benefit to teachers and principals at lower levels of the education management hierarchy, but it is also of great advantage to inspectors, and managers in regional offices and at head office level. Teachers will improve their classroom practice, will have better ideas of what must be taught, and will benefit from ideas and materials that other teachers have developed. Similarly, inspectors and other managers benefit by having local management committees and cluster centre principals taking more responsibilities and decisions. All of this makes the lives of teachers, principals, inspectors and other managers easier and more rewarding. These are the incentives that should encourage people at various levels in the MBESC to support, own and foster the cluster system.

Lastly, the cluster system was essentially a framework that was designed and implemented by people outside the immediate school network, people in BEP, the regional offices and consultants. That framework has now been embraced, adapted and used for a multitude of purposes that suit local needs. Most of the innovations have come from people in the schools themselves, an observation that suggests both a high degree of ownership and a demand for the cluster system.

Applications in terms of the MBESC guiding goals

In its guiding document of 1993, *Toward Education for All*, the MBESC identified as its guiding goals improved access, equity, quality, democracy and efficiency.

- "Access" pertains to providing education for all through expanding capacity and addressing barriers that prevent children from going to school.
- "Equity" relates to the commitment to allocate educational resources fairly throughout the nation.

- "Quality" refers to the provision of good education by supplying schools with well-prepared teachers and ensuring that inspectors and advisory staff strive to improve the system.
- "Democracy" refers to developing a system of education in which teachers, parents, school communities and learners are directly involved in the education process.
- Underpinning these goals is the need to reduce waste and to increase "efficiency" and thus to develop a measurably effective system.

These five goals provide a useful framework within which to consider applications of the school cluster system.

Improved access:
The cluster system is already improving access in some places by organizing schools into networks which provide a range of grades within each cluster and therefore close to the homes of as many learners as possible. More learners thus have better opportunities of attending higher grades. Planning within a cluster context has also helped to improve the provision of classrooms, teachers and schools for the children in a given area.

Greater equity:
Several aspects of the cluster system have helped to improve equity. In general terms, this has occurred as a result of improved conditions in many schools. Thus, teachers, textbooks, school equipment and other resources have been more efficiently and fairly distributed and shared. More learners have also been exposed to better teaching practices where schemes of work and examinations have been standardised so that learners are taught the necessary basics for each level.

Better quality:
The establishment of cluster-based groups for each subject or phase has helped to improve the quality of teaching in many schools. The groups have allowed teachers to share ideas, lesson plans, examination questions and papers, and other teaching materials. Good teaching practices and teaching resources at schools are therefore shared with other schools in the cluster. Teachers are no longer left to work in isolation, but become members of teams striving for common goals and supporting each other in attaining these goals. This is perhaps the most important innovation and application of the cluster system, because it largely reflects a "homegrown demand" for more collegial support, support of a kind that can easily be offered and structured through clusters. It also strongly suggests that NIED and its Advisory Services should specifically align its activities to foster mutual support between teachers in clusters to improve learning and teaching.

Cluster centres and their principals are helping to improve staff supervision and accountability in the cluster. The centres can serve as good examples to other schools, in terms of management, teaching practice and performance.

Greater participation:
To enhance democratic participation, the cluster system provides a framework that encourages the involvement of teachers, parents, school communities and learners in the learning environment. Cluster centres provide venues for various participatory activities such as in-service training, school board training, and the organisation of sports and cultural events. Furthermore, the cluster system promotes the concept of decentralisation, as shown by examples in the Katima Mulilo region. More management decisions are being made at local levels in schools and clusters. Cluster management committees, made up of all cluster principals in each cluster, provide a platform for sharing and resolving problems in the clusters, and reporting back to inspectors. Principals thus take more responsibility for general management issues and can be held accountable for their decisions. Inspectors are now released from attending to mundane issues at schools, and can concentrate more on their role as the link between clusters of schools and the REO. Circuit management committees, comprising the cluster centre principals and the inspector, ensure that information flows from cluster level to circuit level and on to regional level, and that checks and balances are properly in place.

The kind of decentralisation described above needs to be promoted, and regional directors should devolve as much authority as possible to circuit and cluster levels. However, there is also scope for enhancing the government's plan to decentralise the management of education to the 13 political regions. For example, schools are already represented through their cluster centre principals on some constituency advisory committees. Similarly, inspectors and selected cluster centre principals serve on some regional education forums. School board committees representing clusters have been established in some clusters to provide wider representation and participation.

Improved efficiency:
Clusters have provided a framework for assessing and planning development needs, both for individual schools and for groups of schools, so that changes and developments can occur in a more rational and effective way. Schools develop more appropriately according to the needs of the communities they serve. More efficient use is made of resources, such as classrooms, teachers and learning materials. Communication between schools and the inspector, REO and Head Office has been improved so that information is more effectively shared, and services are brought closer to the teachers and learners. The distribution of materials collection of statistics has improved by channelling these activities through cluster centres. This has saved time and transport costs. Better supervision by cluster centre principals and inspectors within circuits and clusters has reduced problems of teacher absenteeism.

Expectations for increased salaries and/or other concessions for cluster centre principals have been raised in some clusters. It is unlikely that these can be provided now because the existing salaries for most principals are high, and the education budget will not be increased. However, appropriate levels of remuneration for different principals could be established if the cluster system is eventually transformed into a more formal structure with clear responsibilities. The formalisation of the cluster system is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

A variety of suggestions are presented below. Some are general recommendations which should create a better overall environment for schooling and the cluster system, while others are much more specific. Certain suggestions should be taken up by the BEP project while others are directed at the MBESC.

Organisational support for clusters

Benefits of the cluster system will not be fully realised unless there is considerable organisational and moral support for clusters. The following suggestions could be taken up by the MBESC and/or BEP:

1) REOs and Head Office should be committed to establishing the cluster system and its structures, and the planned National Inspectorate must support, strengthen and work through the cluster system.

2) The REOs and inspectorate should implement firm management structures at circuit management and cluster management levels, together with clearly delegated duties at each level. Decision-making powers of inspectors and cluster management structures need to be enhanced and clarified.

3) Where necessary, circuit offices need to be developed as decentralised duty stations for inspection services, and inspectors need to be motivated to activate circuit and cluster management committees in all circuits. Inspectors should be encouraged to collaborate across circuits and regions to get ideas and support in solving a range of problems.

4) A system of induction needs to be developed for new cluster centre principals and inspectors to promote continuity.

5) There is considerable scope for improved quality if the MBESC's plan for educator development and support (EDS) is implemented through the cluster system. EDS units are now being established at TRCs, which will be called EDS centres from now on. Advisory teachers will operate from the centres, offering upgrading courses to teachers, and support to subject groups, which will be run by trained subject facilitators. Advisory teachers and subject facilitators will then be exposed to continuing professional development at a regional rather than national level.

   Subject groups and examination committees have been developed by the cluster system and are already active in many clusters throughout the country. These committees can be linked to EDS centres, and the subject groups and management committees in each cluster will allow teachers to express their needs for educator development. Advisory teachers in the EDS centres can thus deliver their services through the subject groups according to the needs of clusters, rather than visiting individual schools. Advisory teachers should also be members of circuit management committees to allow for better advisory support and rapid intervention when problems arise.

   The Advisory Service as a whole needs to be strengthened. More advisory teachers must be appointed, they should be placed at decentralized circuit offices, and EDS units should be developed at the circuit offices. Existing resource centres should be moved to circuit offices. If each circuit has an advisory teacher, that person could provide general, non-subject specific services and advice for the circuit. A National Advisory Service could then be established to provide subject specific services, subject specialists then being bought into clusters more on a

demand basis. This would allow for a parallel development to the one being planned for the National Inspectorate.

The use of the cluster system as a framework for training will further strengthen the existing Lower Primary Reform programme by ensuring that training is not done in isolation, but is instead followed up through feedback by the trained teachers into the clusters.

6) The concepts of common schemes of work and shared question papers should be encouraged, and circuit-based examinations should be promoted in all regions, at least annually for each subject from Grade 5 to 12.

7) Planning activities should be promoted at the cluster level, for example in allocating teachers efficiently and rationalising grades and schools with low enrolments. Development plans for the clusters should be formulated.

8) NIED is running the "Upgrading of African Languages" project, which focuses on the professional development of primary school teachers and on developing and producing relevant teaching and learning materials. The project will be implemented using facilitators in each cluster. The involvement of communities in this project can also be strengthened using the cluster system, since school board representation at the cluster level will enhance access to communities.

9) The promotion of programmes on HIV/AIDS awareness in the education sector can be facilitated by the cluster system. One proposal is to train a facilitator in each cluster to encourage the inclusion of accurate facts about the disease in general classroom teaching. This facilitator would also set up support groups in clusters to counsel those directly affected by the disease. Inspectors and advisory teachers would facilitate the training at circuit levels, teaching basic counselling skills to facilitators as well as techniques for the raising of awareness in the cluster context.

10) REOs should make maximum use of the mechanisms supplied by the cluster system, not only for data collection, but also for textbook and stationery supplies.

11) Support for the development of school boards should continue, with an emphasis on increased community participation in education.

12) The BEP advisor and the local inspector should resolve the problems of certain cluster centres not being active, either by changing the cluster centre or by counselling the stakeholders involved in the cluster.

13) In the Rundu region, all cluster centres should at least be upgraded to full primary level with permanent structures, and informal hostels if there is a need. Some regrouping of schools within the larger remote inland clusters is necessary.

14) Mobile schools should be incorporated into the school cluster system, and schools catering for marginalized groups will benefit from being more involved in cluster groups with other schools in their area. This will especially help bring these schools and their teachers into contact with other more formal schools.

15) There is merit for developing cluster centres into the local centres of excellence proposed by the Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training. The centres should not be elitist institutions, but will show what can be done if good practices are adopted.

16) Clusters provide an excellent framework for the implementation of new learner:teacher ratios, especially if the system of functional school units (as recommended below) is adopted. Clusters also provide frameworks for the local co-ordination of different donor and other projects.

17) It is apparent that steps will soon be taken to have education managed through the thirteen political regions. This will offer an excellent opportunity to formalise the cluster system, and we recommend that the processes of decentralization and formalizing the clusters take place at the same time. Some changes will have to be made to the boundaries of existing clusters to make them align with the borders of the political regions.

Logistical support for clusters

1) Resource or EDS centres should be established at circuit offices, bringing advisory services and teaching aids closer to schools.

2) Cluster centres should be provided with facilities such as libraries and science laboratories because these facilities will uplift standards in clusters.

3) All circuit offices should obtain risographs and duplicating paper. Assistance with copying facilities at cluster centres would enable the sharing of question papers to become more efficient. Workshop and copying equipment for each cluster centre would improve the quality of presentations: for example, an overhead projector, a photocopier, some kind of typewriter, as well as flipcharts, stationery and notice boards. Increased telephone allocations and fax machines are needed for cluster centres. Storeroom and meeting facilities and toilets are necessary for cluster centres. Pressure should be exerted on the relevant authorities to extend electrical and telephone services to all circuit offices and cluster centres.

4) Deputy principals or HODs should be appointed at cluster centres, to do delegated duties and relieve the workload of the cluster centre principal. School secretaries are needed at cluster centres.

5) Support should be offered for the purpose of networking, and travelling to other regions, to learn from others and share ideas. Likewise, there is a need for team building at all levels of management, as collaboration and consultation skills need to be improved.

6) Training courses are needed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the cluster system, especially for principals, HODs, secretaries and school boards. It would be useful to develop a special training module on the cluster system and its potential applications. There is an expressed need for manuals detailing the pertinent facts about the cluster approach. Training for secretaries of circuits, and for all school boards, needs financial support.

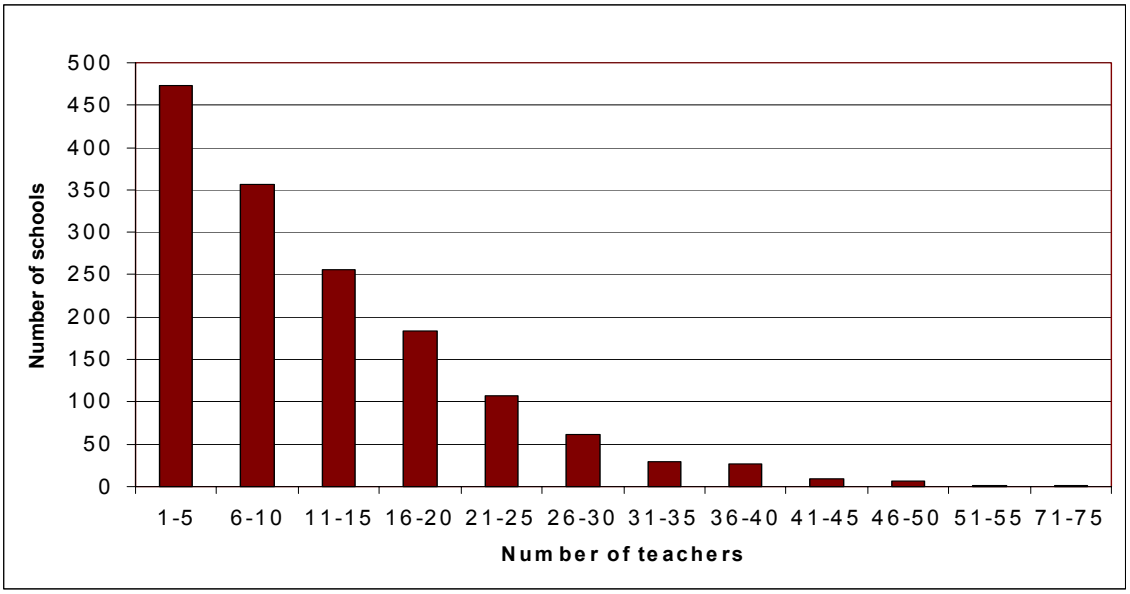
7) There is an expressed need for professional input from the Advisory Services into all subjects. Issues such as the teaching of mathematics and English, and the switch from mother tongue medium of instruction to English at the lower primary level, need special attention.

8) Full-time BEP educational advisors should be appointed in the Keetmanshoop and Rundu regions.

Towards formalising the cluster system

It is clear that steps should be taken to formalise cluster structures and functions. Although there are a number of ways in which this can be done, we recommend a system of functional school units. This system is recommended, first, because of the real benefits of clusters and, second, because of problems that stem from two features of many schools in Namibia. These are the small size and relative isolation of so many schools. The following graph makes it that a great number of schools are small. About one

third (31%) of all schools have five or fewer teachers, and over half (54%) of all schools have ten or fewer teachers. Only 5% of all schools have 30 or more teachers. Isolation has several dimensions, all of which mean that schools are seldom visited by colleagues from other schools, or by inspectors, advisory teachers and other regional managers. Many schools are indeed far away, road conditions are often bad, vehicles are in short supply, budgets for travel are depleted, there are too few inspectors and advisory teachers, and these people are often too busy or preoccupied with other matters.



The number of schools with different numbers of teachers in Namibia

The small size and isolation of so many schools means that most teachers are professionally isolated, especially from people teaching the same subjects to the same grades. Most Grade 5 Mathematics teachers, for example, present their lessons and examinations for years without being able to benefit from or share ideas with other teachers in the "same boat". Each teacher will interpret the syllabus differently, setting different schemes of work and different standards for examination. It is this not surprising that the results of national examinations are often so poor.

The cluster system offers the opportunity of reducing much of this isolation. Principals and teachers in small schools can come together to share their ideas, problems, solutions, schemes of work test papers, and experience. Contact of this kind is also mutually stimulating. The principal from one school can also help to manage neighbouring schools. However, it is also recognised that clusters do not benefit large schools to the same extent because their teachers and principals are not isolated.

It is recommended that the MBESC formalise the cluster system and its functions and management structures into Functional Schooling Units (FSU). Each FSU would consist of a given number of teachers: perhaps 30 to 40 teachers. Each existing cluster of schools would be one such unit. Small schools would thus be bought together into formal management units, each FSU providing staff with mutual support and all the other benefits of clusters. Very large schools could have the option to retain their autonomy. The establishment of FSU's would provide for more logical and economical management structures for schools.

Each FSU would be managed by a cluster management team, consisting of the senior principal at the cluster centre, deputy principals at the satellite schools and a number of HOD's appointed to provide guidance for general teaching practice. The total number of principals in Namibia could be reduced to something like 300 senior principals. Another 2,500 Deputies and HODs might be needed if there

were seven or eight such posts per unit. The following table provides an idea of what kind of savings could be achieved if salaries paid to cluster centre principals were to be increased by about 15% compared to those now paid to be best-paid principals, and those for deputy principals and HODs were held at current levels:

Current establishment:

	Number of posts	**Annual salary**	**Total**
Principal	1,420	$ 115,000	$ 163,300,000
Deputy/HOD	1,550	$ 105,000	$ 162,750,000
Total cost of salaries:			**$ 326,050,000**

Establishment with FSU's:

	Number of posts	**Annual salary**	**Total**
Principal	300	$ 140,000	$ 42,000,000
Deputy/HOD	2,300	$ 105,000	$ 241,500,000
Total cost of salaries:			**$ 283,500,000**

Saving achieved by FSU system: **$ 42,550,000**

These are illustrative figures only, and the savings could be greater or lower after a careful analysis is done, cluster by cluster, of exactly what number of posts would be needed. Three points remain clear, however:

- The cluster system has many benefits to offer.
- Clusters can improve education in the great majority of schools in Namibia.
- A good deal of money could be saved if the cluster system was formalized.