‘All for Education’—Meeting the Governance Challenge

Brian Levy

DOI:10.1093/oso/9780198824053.003.0010

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter explores some implications for education policy of the research laid out in this book. First, it reviews the empirical results on how context, the quality of hierarchical and horizontal governance, and educational outcomes interact. Both the interests of stakeholders and the ideas which they hold vis-à-vis the system’s functioning shape influence whether low-level equilibrium traps take hold, and how they can be overcome. Second, it lays out a two-part policy approach—practical initiatives for incrementally improving hierarchical and horizontal governance, plus a broader reframing of the ideas surrounding how education and other public services should be provided. The overall aim is to initiate a process which proceeds deliberately, and incrementally, while cumulatively building momentum for re-orienting the system as a whole towards learning.

Keywords: active citizenship, harambee, Kenya, low-level equilibrium traps, hierarchy, horizontal governance, interests, ideas, incremental reform

10.1 Introduction

Over the past quarter century, access to schooling has expanded rapidly the world over, but gains in literacy and numeracy have proven harder to come by. Transforming schooling into learning for all is a central challenge of our time. This book addresses the challenge through a focus on the governance of public education in South Africa, a country whose legacy of discrimination, inequality and poverty gives special urgency to the task of improving educational outcomes. Chapters 2–9 set out the empirical findings as to the relationship
between governance and educational outcomes. This chapter explores some potential policy implications.

In any educational system, the crucial learning relationship is that between the learner and teacher—so research as to what pedagogical approaches are effective has, for good reason, been a central focus of efforts to strengthen educational outcomes. Attention to pedagogy has been of special salience in South Africa. As Chapter 2 of the book detailed, the post-apartheid transformation of South Africa’s education system was multi-dimensional. Alongside far-reaching fiscal, equity and institutional changes, the country also had to re-orient teaching away from inherited master-servant patterns, put in place a wholly new post-apartheid curriculum and, more broadly, learn about the kinds of non-elitist pedagogical approaches which can achieve rapid gains for an historically oppressed population.

But the fact that pedagogy matters does not diminish the salience of governance. For one thing, though much has been learned about effective pedagogy, the gains have not yet spread broadly. Getting beyond pilot initiatives and working at scale by disseminating knowledge as to what works, and supporting teachers seeking to adopt new practices, is a central function of education bureaucracies—and thus how they are governed. More broadly, governance arrangements matter crucially for outcomes because they structure the incentives, constraints, rewards and sanctions of a system’s participants—and thereby shape the efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are used to achieve the intended results.

All too often, governance challenges have been conceived in narrowly technocratic terms—with a presumption that, given enough ‘capacity’ and ‘political will’, shortfalls in governance can be addressed straightforwardly. However, as a classic report on Making Services Work for Poor People underscored:

To frequently those seeking improvement have focused only on internal organizational reforms—focusing on management of the frontline workers. If organizational failures are the result of deeper weaknesses in institutional arrangements…direct attacks on the proximate determinants (more money, better training, more internal information) will fail.¹

Building on this critique, in recent years scholars and practitioners have explored in depth the relationships between context, governance and development outcomes. The nostrum that ‘context matters’ in shaping the efficacy of specific governance arrangements has become commonplace. The frontier challenge, explored in this book, is to probe how context matters—how the preferred (‘good fit’) approach to improving outcomes varies according to specific political and institutional contexts.
This book has explored the link between context and good fit in relation to a specific governance-related question: what should be the balance between hierarchical and horizontal institutional arrangements for the public provision of basic education? As Chapter 1 reviews, some scholars and practitioners argue that education should be tightly managed hierarchically—with strong, top-down control of recruitment, promotion, curriculum and the content of classroom-level instruction. But others argue for more horizontal approaches which delegate significant resources and responsibility to internal and community stakeholders at the school level, thereby allowing for the development of appropriate context-specific solutions. Following the logic laid out above, an obvious response to the hierarchical-horizontal debate is to argue that the appropriate balance between hierarchical and horizontal governance depends crucially on context. But how?

South Africa's far-reaching reforms of the education sector, laid out in the 1996 South African Schools Act (SASA), provide an ideal 'natural experiment' for exploring the interplay between context, hierarchical and horizontal governance. SASA replaced the pre-existing, fragmented and racially-ordered institutional arrangements with a unified, multi-tiered system:

- The national-level was assigned responsibility for policymaking, for resourcing the system, and for setting the overall regulatory framework.
- The provincial-level was assigned responsibility for implementation—for spending the budgetary resources made available from the centre, and employing the teachers, administrators and other personnel who comprised the vast majority of employees in the system.
- Substantial school-level responsibilities (including important roles in the recruitment of the school principal and senior teachers) were assigned to school-governing bodies (SGBs) in which parents were required to be in the majority.

Chapters 2–7 of the book explored how politics and institutions influence the structure and performance of South Africa's education bureaucracies at both the national level (Chapters 2 and 3), and the provincial level (Chapters 4–7). Chapters 8 and 9 detailed the results of school-level case studies conducted in South Africa's Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces.

The current chapter explores the implications of the findings for action, situating the analysis within the broader context of the education system as a whole. Section 10.2 lays out the policy possibilities, limitations, synergies and constraints of hierarchical and horizontal governance in the South African context. Section 10.3 synthesizes the school-level case study findings, highlighting the links between hyper-local governance dynamics and performance. Section 10.4 explores why it has been so difficult, in South Africa
and elsewhere, to address the challenges of governance (and other) reforms in the education sector—and how these challenges might be addressed more effectively.

10.2 Hierarchical and Horizontal Governance Revisited

Theory tells us that both hierarchical and horizontal governance have the potential to support good educational outcomes, in distinctive ways. A well-functioning hierarchy can undertake efficiently many of the logistical tasks (e.g. teacher post provisioning, payroll, infrastructure provisioning and maintenance, textbook and supplies management) associated with a large public educational system. Crucially for the South African context, a well-functioning bureaucracy potentially can also function as a transmission belt, investing in learning about pedagogical approaches which improve educational outcomes, and communicating the results throughout the school system.

(p.259) Horizontal governance also has the potential to add value—both as a complement and as a substitute for hierarchy. As Chapter 1 explored in depth, in sectors such as education where service provision is diffused geographically, delegation of authority to local levels potentially can improve performance. Where bureaucracy is strong, horizontal governance potentially can function as a complement:

• helping to customize provision in ways which are responsive to the local context;
• improving motivation—with a ‘zone of autonomy’ at the service provision front line providing the opportunity for internal leaders to motivate their teams effectively, including by fostering an environment of continuing learning on the part of staff as well as students;
• creating scope for the utilization of local-level information of a kind to which higher-level hierarchical authorities lack access—and thereby enhancing processes for the selection of good quality staff and leaders, and the efficacy of efforts to hold staff and leaders accountable for their performance.

Where bureaucracy is weak, horizontal governance potentially can be useful in a different way. Along with the specifically local functions highlighted above, local participation could function as a potential institutional substitute—providing support for some of the logistical, managerial and oversight functions which in other contexts might be done hierarchically.

Figure 10.1 suggests one way of framing how hierarchical and horizontal governance might interact in different contexts. The horizontal axis distinguishes between settings where hierarchical governance is relatively strong, and settings where it is weak. The vertical axis distinguishes between settings where school governing body and community engagement is
developmental, and those where it is weak or predatory. The barrier along the horizontal axis signals that (for reasons explored in detail in Chapter 7 and discussed further (p.260) below) the potential to strengthen hierarchy is limited in contexts where politics and institutions are personalized, patronage-oriented and fragmented.

Three distinctive ways of leveraging governance to improve educational outcomes in different contexts are suggested by the figure:

- In settings where political and institutional constraints are such that weaknesses in bureaucratic capability are unlikely to be remediable—endeavouring to improve outcomes by moving from quadrant A to quadrant B, with participatory horizontal governance functioning as a potential institutional substitute.
- In settings illustrated by quadrant C where hierarchical governance is relatively strong, horizontal governance is weak, and educational outcomes are disappointing—endeavouring to identify targeted ways of leveraging and building on the pre-existing strengths of the hierarchy to improve outcomes (i.e. improving outcomes while remaining within quadrant C).
- (Also with quadrant C as a starting point): complementing hierarchical initiatives with efforts to strengthen horizontal governance—that is, trying to move from quadrant C to quadrant D.

The sections which follow elaborate on these options, drawing on both the results of the Western Cape and Eastern Cape case studies, and the broader comparative literature.

10.2.1 Hierarchies in Practice

The comparison of South Africa’s Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces illustrates vividly how divergent socio-economic, political and institutional contexts shape the performance of education bureaucracies. Table 10.1 summarizes some of the contextual differences between the two provinces. Chapter 7 provides more detailed information, and analyses in depth the causal mechanisms through which these distinctive contexts affect the behaviour of their bureaucracies.

The Eastern Cape provided a strikingly unpropitious political and institutional context for the consolidation of a results-oriented bureaucracy. The province
inherited from the apartheid era a fragmented, patronage-oriented bureaucracy. Its weak middle class, and the electoral dominance of one political party, translated into weak demand-side pressure for better services. Fragmentation among elites within the dominant party fuelled further the predisposition to seek influence via patronage. The result was that, as Chapter 5 details, the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) has been bedevilled by divergent and competing regional interests, organizational (p.261) cultures, and patronage ties which consistently defied centralized control. It has experienced repeated leadership turnover and a general flouting of centralized authority. Obstacles to enforcing management control and sustaining leadership continuity have contributed to chronic weaknesses in both financial and personnel management. This low-level equilibrium proved resistant to change, even when the provincial department of education was taken under administration by central government.

Table 10.1. Two Divergent Contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Socio-economic</th>
<th>2. Political</th>
<th>3. Inherited institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Western Cape</strong></td>
<td>- elites dispersed across multiple political parties with two broad groupings</td>
<td>Inheritance of ‘impersonal’ bureaucracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- competitive elections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eastern Cape</strong></td>
<td>- ANC electorally dominant;</td>
<td>Inheritance of patronage bantustan bureaucracies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- deep intra-party fragmentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogenous social composition—disproportionately poor &amp; Xhosa-speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: chapter 7

The question naturally arises as to whether, as per Figure 10.1, horizontal governance might serve in an Eastern Cape-type setting as at least a partial institutional substitute for hierarchical weakness. On this score, the research findings are somewhat encouraging. The comparative econometric analysis laid out in Chapter 6 found that including ‘parental contribution to school construction and maintenance’ as an explanatory variable had a positive and statistically significant effect on educational outcomes. The school-level case study analyses in Chapter 9 (on which more below) detailed the causal mechanisms through which participatory governance can (but need not) have a positive influence on school performance.
By contrast to the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape’s socio-economic, political and institutional context provided a supportive platform for relatively strong bureaucratic capability, oriented towards public service provision. As Chapter 5 details, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) does well the core tasks of a bureaucracy: managing resources; assigning personnel to where they are most needed; monitoring and managing on the basis of performance. In turn, as Chapter 6 explored econometrically, these bureaucratic strengths translated into gains in educational outcomes relative to other South African provinces, even once other determinants of outcomes are controlled for. But strikingly, the econometric analysis in Chapter 6 also showed that, for all of the strengths of its bureaucracy, when compared with some other African educational systems (notably Kenya), the outcomes achieved by the Western Cape were mediocre (paralleling quadrant C in Figure 10.1). Why this might be the case is considered further in section 10.4.

The above is not intended to imply that there is no scope for provincial-level leaders (both political and technocratic) to improve education bureaucracies. But it does imply that these individual efforts can be supported by (or confounded by) context. Note, though, that the Table 10.1 divergence in contexts between the two provinces is extreme. In such contexts, the status quo will be more tightly locked in (again, for good or ill), so change will be more constrained, and more incremental. Had the research been undertaken in other provinces, it is likely that in at least some of them, the exogenous variables would have aligned in a more mixed way. In these more mixed cases, the quality of public bureaucracy would be more of a knife edge, with scope for more rapid improvement (or more rapid decline).

10.2.2 Horizontal Governance in Practice

Plausibly, as Figure 10.1 suggests, horizontal governance can offset some of hierarchical governance’s limitations: in settings such as the Eastern Cape, where the capabilities of hierarchies are weak, but where the broader context renders bureaucratic improvement infeasible, it might serve as an institutional substitute. In all settings, it could serve as an institutional complement, taking on specific hyper-local functions which fall below the radar even of relatively well-performing bureaucracies. But does this happen in practice?

SASA’s assignment of substantial school-level responsibilities (including the recruitment of the school principal and senior teachers) to school governing bodies (SGBs) in which parents are required to be in the majority provides an excellent opportunity for exploring empirically the extent to which horizontal governance can indeed realize its potential as complement and/or partial substitute for hierarchies. But paradoxically SASA’s seeming empowerment of the school-level cannot be taken as a signal that South Africa’s education system has embraced horizontal governance.
As discussed further in the final section of this chapter, momentum for the empowerment of SGBs in SASA came via two sources: via the interests of affluent parents who had been beneficiaries of apartheid-era public schooling; and via those anti-apartheid activists who had embraced a participatory vision of democracy. While the latter influence weakened rapidly, the concerns of white South Africans that quality be maintained in the public schools which historically had served their children shaped both the design (p.263) and implementation of policy towards SGBs. The delegation of substantial authority to the school level, including the right to top-up public funds with self-financing by the parent body, was a way of assuaging these concerns.

However, while affluent families can relatively straightforwardly take on the enhanced school-level responsibilities assigned by SASA, the challenge is more formidable for poor families. Whether and how the rhetorical embrace of participation might translate into genuine empowerment of parents and communities, beyond the already-empowered elites, was a central question of the school-level case study research reported in Chapters 8 and 9 and is explored comparatively in section 10.3 below. To set the stage for that analysis, it is helpful first to lay out some of the relevant issues and evidence raised from the global comparative literature.

Research worldwide suggests that strengthened horizontal governance can (but need not) improve educational outcomes. Bruns, Filmer, and Patrinos (2011) offer rich detail on dozens of carefully evaluated horizontal reforms, including reforms to improve school-based management, to enhance information transparency, and to make teachers more accountable for performance. They find considerable variations in impact; some interventions turn out to make a significant positive difference, others have been ineffective. Mansuri and Rao’s (2013) multi-sector and multi-country review of whether participation works finds a similarly variable set of effects. What accounts for these variations?

One possible explanation for the variation is that the potential for horizontal governance is inherently limited in settings where parents are poor and uneducated, and thus lack the requisite basic skills (let alone knowledge of pedagogy) to participate effectively in school governance. This explanation is not consistent with the evidence of positive impact (including in poor communities with low levels of education) cited above. The school-level case studies summarized below add to the evidence by detailing the causal mechanisms through which horizontal governance can have a positive impact, even when parents themselves lack education.

A second possible explanation is that the cause of variations in performance lies not so much in governance as in divergent pedagogical and managerial practices. A pessimistic view would be that the technical constraints are binding, so there are no gains to be had from strengthening horizontal governance. A
more optimistic view is that even in such circumstances enhanced participation can transform interactions at the school-level—strenghening accountability and commitment to results, and more broadly fostering mutual solidarity and a learning-oriented culture. The school-level findings in section 10.3 shed empirical light on this question.

(p.264) A third common explanation for variation across locales is that the efficacy of horizontal governance depends on power—with parents in poor communities generally disempowered relative to teachers, school leadership and the organizational structures (bureaucracies and unions) of education. Thus, so the concern goes, even if horizontal governance can be shown to add value, efforts to strengthen it will be blocked by more powerful stakeholders with a vested interest in the status quo. Analytically, as Levy (2014) explores, this issue concerns the strength of developmentally oriented stakeholders relative to predatory actors seeking to capture school-level resources for private or political purposes—and whether these threat/trumping dynamics are rigid, or subject to change. Again, the school-level case studies in section 10.3 provide empirical insight.

10.3 Governance at the School Level
The school-level governance research detailed in Chapters 8 and 9 explored the causal mechanisms through which educational outcomes were shaped by interactions between school leadership and other stakeholders inside and outside the school. This section provides a comparative synthesis of some key findings.

The research focused on eight schools—four in the Western Cape and four in the Eastern Cape. The case studies adopted a process tracing methodology, which enabled them to drill into the details of the causal mechanisms through which horizontal governance influenced school-level outcomes. To control for the influence of socio-economic conditions on performance, the initial intention was to target matched pairs of successful and less successful schools within the same community. While the eight schools indeed comprised four sets of geographically contiguous matched pairs, the patterns of success and weakness turned out to be more complex than initially had been expected. All eight schools had gone through a change in principal over the relevant period, making for the three distinct governance ‘episodes’ illustrated in Figure 10.2: an initial period; a transitional period, and associated process of selection of a new principal; and a later period. As detailed later, within-school variations in performance over time turned out to be strongly associated with changes in principal.
Table 10.2 summarizes the main findings from the case studies vis-à-vis the influence of hierarchical and horizontal governance in each school. The (p.265) table distinguishes between two facets of hierarchical governance: hierarchical influence exerted by the relevant provincial department, and leadership by the school principal. The school-level findings as to the role of provincial bureaucracies are consistent with the provincial-level evidence of Chapters 4–7. In none of the Eastern Cape case studies was there any evidence that the ECDoE offered more than very modest help to foster a performance orientation at the school-level. The Western Cape’s WCED, by contrast, played a more pro-active role—but there are some paradoxical findings, which are best considered jointly in the discussion below of the role of the school principal.

As the table also summarizes, there were substantial variations across schools—and within schools over time—in the influence of horizontal governance. In some schools, for some periods of time, its influence was positive. In others, a variety of school-level stakeholders were complicit in the capture of school-level resources for more narrowly personalized purposes. The efficacy (p.266) of horizontal governance turned out to be strongly associated with the approach to leadership of the school principal, with some striking interactions between the (Figure 10.2) initial period and later period patterns.

Table 10.2. Governance and Performance in the Case Study Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Eastern Cape</th>
<th>Western Cape</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I: INFLUENCE OF HIERARCHICAL GOVERNANCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of provincial bureaucracy</strong></td>
<td>- Protects dysfunctional status quo in two schools;</td>
<td>WCED buttresses authority of charismatic principals in initial period in two schools, but performance declined when the principals left.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Offers modest support for school principals seeking turnaround in later period in two schools.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of school-level leaders</strong></td>
<td>How authority is exercised by school leaders consistently has a strong influence on governance and performance in all periods in all schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II: INFLUENCE OF HORIZONTAL GOVERNANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive influence</th>
<th>Eastern Cape</th>
<th>Western Cape</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Sustained performance-oriented multi-stakeholder governance in one school</td>
<td>- Stakeholder supported turnaround in one school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Stakeholder initiated turnaround in two schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative influence</th>
<th>Eastern Cape</th>
<th>Western Cape</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Ongoing capture in one school</td>
<td>- Ongoing capture in one school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Capture during earlier period in two schools</td>
<td>- Capture in latter period in one school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Conflictual principal succession disrupts performance in one school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The centrality of the school principal has been identified in global research on school-level governance as an important proximate determinant of school performance (Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi, 2010). The findings in the Chapter 8 and 9 case studies are consistent with this, but with a crucial addition. As they underscore, the principal does not function in isolation, but is embedded in a dense network of horizontal interactions with teachers, with the school governing body (SGB), with parents, and with the community more broadly. Over time, these relationships—and how the principal nurtures them (or fails to nurture them)—are key underlying determinants of school-level educational outcomes.

Table 10.3 applies the governance framework introduced in Chapter 1 and used throughout this volume to characterize some different ways in which school principals approach engagement with other stakeholders. The framework is organized around two dimensions of school-level governance arrangements. One dimension distinguishes between hierarchical and more horizontal, peer-to-peer modes of structuring authority—with the former organized around vertical relationships between ‘principals’ and ‘agents’, and the latter organized around negotiated understandings among multiple stakeholders. The second dimension distinguishes between impersonal and personalized governance arrangements—
with the former built around rules which apply equally to all who have standing, and the latter structured around informal understanding among influential actors.

In practice, any specific governance arrangement is likely to be a hybrid combination of the resulting four cells, with the relative weight varying from school to school. A useful heuristic way of describing these hybrid patterns is to allocate 100 points across the four cells. Table 10.3 highlights three distinct patterns. Each builds on, but should not be interpreted as being identical to, (p. 267) school-specific patterns of interaction among stakeholders described in depth in the Chapter 8 and 9 case studies.

The first pattern, illustrated heuristically in Table 10.3 panel A and evident in three schools, comprises strong top-down leadership by a charismatic, committed results-oriented principal. As Chapter 8 details, in the two Western Cape schools this leadership was underpinned by support from a well-functioning bureaucracy. This leadership style yielded good results—but (for reasons explored below) only in the initial period.

### Table 10.3. Three Patterns of School-Level Governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Hierarchical</th>
<th>Horizontal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Principal-centric governance</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personalized</td>
<td>Impersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Collaborative governance</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personalized</td>
<td>Impersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: Bottom-up governance</td>
<td>0–50</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40–90</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personalized</td>
<td>Impersonal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a second pattern, illustrated by Table 10.3 panel B, the school principal’s approach to leadership is strongly collaborative. Among the case study schools, the clearest illustration of strong, participatory leadership was a school in the Eastern Cape. The institutional culture of the school, established by its founding principal, was one where all stakeholders—teachers, the SGB, the extended community—felt included. Even with the ECDoE, which was carefully kept at
arm’s length, relationships remained cordial. This pattern of collaborative governance was underpinned by impersonal rules, collectively developed, collectively owned, and largely self-imposed.

The third pattern, evident in the initial period in four of the eight schools, was one of weak/captured leadership. In two cases (one in each province) this dysfunctional leadership can be linked directly to the predatory preferences of a ‘strong’ principal, who inculcated a culture of self-seeking and inattention to learning throughout their schools. In the remaining two schools (both in the Eastern Cape) leadership was relatively weak; in one of the two there was a low-level equilibrium of capture with the principal, teachers, and the SGB working in cahoots with one another; in the other the stakeholders were mired in endemic conflict.

The way in which school principals engaged with other stakeholders in the initial period had a powerful impact on the interactions in subsequent periods—with principal succession comprising the critical juncture. In three of the eight case study schools, the initial period equilibrium proved to be robust over time:

- A high-level equilibrium of strong performance persisted throughout the period of study in the Eastern Cape school which had successfully inculcated a set of collaborative governance arrangements in the first period. (Indeed, this was the only one of the eight case study schools which consistently sustained relatively strong performance throughout the period of study.) The school’s inclusive culture supported a smooth process of principal succession. The successor principal, an internal candidate from within the teaching staff, had been mentored by the initial principal, enjoyed the support of the SGB and, once appointed, continued along the path that had been established.
- A low-level equilibrium persisted in two schools (one in each province), with captured/weak SGBs selecting school principals who (in one case) actively supported the continuation of the dysfunctional equilibrium and (in the other) seemed powerless to reverse the dysfunctions, despite what seemed to be good intentions.

In the remaining five schools, the inter-temporal dynamics were less stable.

Three schools went from relatively strong to weak performance. Strikingly, all three were schools where initially strong performance was based on charismatic leadership by the principal—with the subsequent declines pointing to the limitations of this ‘heroic’ style of leadership. Though in the short term, the determined efforts of a strong principal can yield success, at some point the time comes for succession. If succession turns out badly (as happened in both of the Western Cape schools), or if the principal loses authority for some other reason...
(as happened in the Eastern Cape example), then this successful performance is likely to be reversed. (Chapter 8’s detailed depiction for two Western Cape schools of how the institutional vacuum that became evident following the exit of a charismatic principal resulted in conflict and a collapse of school performance is especially salient.)

The remaining two case study schools (one in the Western Cape, and one in the Eastern Cape) offer vivid examples of performance turnaround—with (as per Table 10.3 panel C) the turnarounds underpinned by active multistakeholder engagement. In the Western Cape turnaround school, poor results in a first cycle of standardized tests, conducted in 2002 and 2004 shocked the school community. In response, and building on close relationships between the principal and the community, an intensive effort was made to improve outcomes, which subsequently rose significantly (although, it must be noted, not to the level of becoming a high performer). This school also was the only one of the four Western Cape case studies where principal transition successfully proceeded by the book.

The role of participatory governance is even more striking in the Eastern Cape example of turnaround. This school had long been characterized by neglectful and predatory leadership on the part of an often-absent principal. The number of pupils had fallen from close to 1,000 in the early 1990s to a low of 341 in 2011. After over a decade(!) of ongoing dysfunction, a group of parents and some SGB members met, and jointly reached the view that the principal needed to be replaced. At the group’s urging, the SGB took their decision to the ECDoE district office. After failing to win support from the bureaucracy, the parent community staged a protest, preventing the principal from accessing the school, and forcing the appointment of a replacement, with whom they worked closely to turn around the school. By 2015, four years after the intervention by parents, the number of pupils in the school had risen to 547, up by 70 per cent from the trough.

In sum, and crucially for policy purposes, the school-level case studies show that stakeholder dynamics are not pre-ordained by either the broader local context or by the strength of the education bureaucracy, but turn out to be contingent and cumulative—with individual agency by stakeholders playing a significant role. This raises the possibility that pro-active interventions potentially could tilt the balance of threat-trumping interactions in some fraction of schools away from predatory and towards more developmental actors, with a positive impact on educational outcomes. This possibility is explored further in section 10.4.

Before concluding the discussion of the school-level case studies, one final empirical finding is worthy of note. Going into the research, the expectation was that the largest teachers’ union, SADTU, would play a significant role in shaping school-level dynamics, using its power to influence appointments, and assert
control more generally. We also expected to see evidence of political parties using the power of appointment for patronage purposes. While we did find a few instances, in general we found that in both provinces hyper-local school-level dynamics were decisive; generally, these were at most loosely linked to these broader union and political influences. For the Western Cape, this likely reflected the relatively robust role played by the WCED’s industrial relations department, which engaged unions in a collaborative rather than top-down manner. For the Eastern Cape, it was perhaps more a symptom of the generalized fragmentation of the province’s politics. Though surprising, this finding is consistent with the observation of a seasoned scholar/practitioner of South African education, Nick Taylor (quoted in Jansen, 2015) that:

When I entered the National Education Evaluation Unit in South Africa’s Department of Basic Education I thought SADTU was a huge problem…But the more I got into the data…I began to realize that there is a bigger problem. The biggest problem is the poor management in many parts of the system. Where management is weak, unions do what they do...

10.4 Orchestrating Change
The research presented in this book has documented uneven governance at every level of South Africa’s educational system. School-level governance turns out to be something of a ‘hit or miss’ affair, with outcomes dependent on hyper-local dynamics between developmental and predatory actors. Provincial-level education bureaucracies have been bogged down by systemic political and institutional constraints in some provinces, and caught up in a cycle of mediocrity in others where the broader constraints seem less binding. National-level policy compromises made to accommodate influential actors (explored in depth in Chapters 2 and 3) have resulted in the prioritization of ‘rules of the game’ which give little more than lip service to quality. The result is an education system in which all too many pupils go to school, but fail to learn.

At the same time, much is known in South Africa as well as elsewhere as to the kinds of pedagogy that can be effective in fostering learning among children from poor, historically deprived backgrounds. For governance, too, there are abundant studies which explore rigorously the efficacy or otherwise of specific interventions.5

Given the urgency of the task, and the seeming availability of knowledge as to how better outcomes can be achieved, the temptation is strong to embrace a ‘just do it’ approach to reform—to argue that getting better results is simply a matter of political will, of the consolidation of power, and mobilization of the will necessary to use that power. However, as both the global experience of efforts at education sector reform and the findings of this study underscore, a ‘just do it’ approach is misguided. Effective reform requires a more skillful way of engaging with the stubborn governance realities that have made it difficult to translate
the global commitment to universal education into genuine gains in learning. This final section uses a systems perspective to explore why it has been so difficult, in South Africa and elsewhere, to address the challenges of governance (and other) reforms in the education sector—and how these challenges might be addressed more effectively.

10.4.1 A Complex System

In recent years, spurred by the proliferation of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and other robust methods of impact evaluation, the discourse on policy reform (in education and elsewhere) often has proceeded along the following lines: identify robustly what works, then scale it up. Yet translating micro-level findings into reforms that make a difference at scale has proven elusive. The central reason, suggests the 2018 World Development Report, *(p.271)* *Learning to Realize Education’s Promise*, is that agendas for ‘scaling-up’ generally are derived from linear extrapolation of specific cause-effect relationships. However, the challenge of working at scale looks very different once education is considered from a broader, systemic perspective.

Pritchett (2015: 11) defines a ‘system’ as ‘a collection of elements or actors, each of which has its own objectives and a collection of feedback loops connecting the elements/actors’.

Figure 10.3, taken from the 2018 World Development Report, illustrates for education. It distinguishes among three levels of the system. At the centre is learning. In the middle level are the proximate drivers of learning: learners, and the extent to which they are prepared (nutritionally, by their family environment, and otherwise) to learn; teachers, and the distinctive skills and motivations they bring to the endeavour; the availability of the inputs (infrastructure, textbooks and other teaching materials) which support the learning environment); and school management. At the outer level are the very many actors who influence the proximate drivers, and thus learning. The different parts are linked through myriad relationships which shape the incentives and constraints on learning.
For a system to be ‘coherent’ (that is, in balance/equilibrium), the goals and incentives of the various actors need to be aligned with one another. This complicates the challenge of education sector reform. As the 2018 World Development Report puts it:

The multiplicity of actors and institutions in an education system makes the outcomes of efforts to improve learning unpredictable...Many systems are stuck in low-learning traps [in which] actors lack either the incentives or the support needed to focus on learning...As actors juggle multiple objectives...it often is in the interest of each to maintain the status quo—even if society, and many of these actors, would be better off if they could shift to a higher-quality equilibrium.6

Ideas as well as interests shape how a system functions. Each of the many actors identified in Figure 10.3 have particular interests. But interests do not function in an ideational vacuum. As Lavers (2016), Lavers and Hickey (2015), World Bank (2015) and Evans (2017) explore in depth, they commonly are accompanied by a set of ideas which offer a narrative as to what goals are desirable, and what means are plausible. Where this underlying narrative varies widely among stakeholders, conflict can be endemic. Where a system is in equilibrium (high or low), the ideas are likely to be widely shared, explicitly or implicitly. Understanding how low-level equilibrium traps take hold and are sustained thus requires careful attention to both the interests of the stakeholders who influence the system, and the ideas which they hold vis-à-vis the system’s functioning.

10.4.2 Hierarchical and Horizontal Governance—Some Low-Level Equilibrium Traps

Questions as to the potential and limits of hierarchical and horizontal governance turn out to be especially deeply intertwined with normative ideas as to how a ‘good’ society should be organized. Thus, while to this point the principal focus of the study has been on the interactions between interests and governance, to understand the potential and obstacles to reform, it is helpful to also bring ideas into the picture. Building on the research findings laid out earlier, this subsection explores how interests and ideas can result in continuing
low-level equilibrium traps, vis-à-vis both hierarchical and horizontal governance.

To begin with hierarchical governance, as summarized earlier in this chapter, differences in socio-economic and political contexts and in institutional legacies from the apartheid era emerged in the present research as central in accounting for differences in bureaucratic performance in South Africa’s Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces. The Eastern Cape’s Department of (p.273) Education performed poorly, but deep-seated political and institutional constraints rendered infeasible the prospect of more than marginal improvements in its functioning. In the Western Cape, the contextual constraints are less binding, but educational outcomes remain disappointing.

But notwithstanding the evidence as to its limitations, in countries where education has long been organized around public bureaucracies, the ideational commitment runs deep to targeting improvements in hierarchical management as the key to better outcomes. Argumentation along these lines can point to multiple examples of successful, hierarchical systems—from (historically) France, to Russia, to Japan and Vietnam—as illustrations of what can be achieved. But the arena of education reform also is replete with examples of hierarchical systems whose performance fails to improve, notwithstanding cycle after cycle of ambitious efforts at reform. To cite just two of many possible examples: Malaysia’s educational outcomes continue to lag its South East Asian peers, notwithstanding five major curricular and pedagogy reforms within the past two decades, none of which addressed the hyper-centralized way in which the country’s system is organized.7 Morocco’s hyper-centralized system also has been the focus of repeated, high-profile reform efforts which, again, neither addressed the hyper-centralized structure, nor yielded the hoped-for results.8

As the 2018 World Development Report suggests, one reason why so many countries become trapped in endless cycles of bureaucratic reforms which lead nowhere is a failure to distinguish between the ‘coherence’ of reforms and whether or not they are aligned towards learning. As Pritchett (2015: 33) argues, bureaucratic reform often centres around ‘process compliance’, a pattern of bureaucratic management in which teachers/principals’ accountability is basically for enrolments and the operation of ‘schooling’…While there might be some vague reference to children actually acquiring needed competencies…‘process (p.274) compliance is, in and of itself and with no reference to outcomes, completely adequate for discharging accountability.

Process compliance can be useful as a veneer which covers the reality of a patronage-driven bureaucracy. It can also take on an ideational life of its own.
Indeed, one plausible explanation for the continuing limitations of the WCED is that it has been so deeply immersed in ‘hierarchy as process compliance’ for so long that repeated efforts at fostering performance management have repeatedly been re-interpreted through a process-compliance lens, undercutting their potential for re-orienting the bureaucracy towards learning.

For horizontal governance, too, interests and ideas interact in accounting for the patterns which persist in South Africa, but with some unusual features relative to other countries. Grindle (2004), taking a broad, systemic perspective, explores in depth for Latin America how efforts to decentralize the governance of education to subnational and school levels were resisted by interests who derived their power from control over bureaucratic hierarchies. In Mexico, Bolivia and Ecuador, resistance by alliances of the bureaucracy and teachers’ unions to efforts to shift authority downwards resulted in a scaling back of the reform agenda. By contrast, reform progressed rapidly, and resulted in major gains in quality in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, where teachers’ unions were less relentlessly opposed to a decentralization of responsibilities down the system.

In South Africa, by contrast, there might seem at first glance to be a more open path for leveraging horizontal governance to improve educational outcomes. For one thing, by contrast to the struggles and only partial gains achieved in Latin America, the 1996 South African Schools Act accords substantial authority to school governing bodies (SGBs). For another, the case study evidence summarized in section 10.3 highlights the potential of horizontal governance as an entry point for improving educational outcomes. The case studies show that strong developmental coalitions can provide a ‘floor’ or support for enhanced decision-making—supporting performance-oriented school principals, and serving as a counterweight to capture. Further, the evidence suggests that school-level dynamics are fluid, raising the possibility that, for at least a subset of schools, pro-active interventions can tilt the balance between developmental and predatory influences in favour of the former. As discussed further below, there is abundant experience from around the world of successful interventions to support horizontal governance. Yet the potential largely has been ignored.

(p.275) A review conducted for this study (Eberhard, 2016) found that outside of the small minority of historically elite, English and Afrikaans medium schools, the South African government has made almost no effort, successful or unsuccessful, to support participatory governance. Further, a 2003 review of school governance (Soudien, 2003) commissioned by the national Minister of Education, and led by an eminent and experienced scholar and educator, identified some key obstacles to horizontal governance in poor communities and put forward a series of proposals as to how the obstacles might be overcome; the report was never released. Even more troubling has been the policy response to a more recent ministerial review report (Department of Basic Education, 2016)
which explored corruption in the recruitment of teachers. The report identified a variety of weaknesses in the recruitment processes, but only one of its recommendations found its way into an amendment proposed in late 2017 to amend SASA (RSA, 2017)—namely a proposal to sharply circumscribe the role of school governing bodies (SGBs) in school-level recruitment and appointments processes.

A plausible explanation for this continuing neglect can be found in the ways in which interests, power and ideas interact with one another. As noted earlier, momentum for the empowerment of SGBs came via two sources: the interests of affluent parents who had been beneficiaries of apartheid-era public schooling; and those anti-apartheid activists who had embraced a participatory vision of democracy. While the former comprised influential stakeholders with a compelling personal interest in SGB policies, the impetus from the latter turned out to be weak.

To be sure, as of the mid-1990s, popular democracy might have appeared to be part of the DNA of South Africa’s liberation struggle: hundreds of community groups had come together under the umbrella of the United Democratic Front (UDF); their efforts helped bring down apartheid. Indeed, participatory governance was embraced by the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which served as the ANC’s election manifesto in 1994. But within a few years, the participatory vision receded into the background. Why?

One common explanation is that, with the announcement of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy in 1996, this participatory democratic vision was hijacked by ‘neoliberal’, technocratic interests. Hijackings aside, there were multiple other reasons why the momentum for popular democracy declined with the ANC’s accession to power. A practical reason is that, having won the election, the ANC needed to govern. To staff its government, it turned to many of the activist-intellectuals who had been part of the UDF. The consequence, in the education sector as well as elsewhere was to deplete the leadership of the organizations which had been at the vanguard of the push for popular democracy (Woolman and Fleisch, 2009: 111).

(p.276) There also were more fundamental reasons for a narrow embrace of hierarchical, less participatory approaches to governing:

Black civil society...had emerged and developed in a context of extreme repression and absolute exclusion, and had as such little experience of transacting with the state. The transition to majority rule thus represented both a political and institutional rupture. The vacuum of authority was quickly filled by the ANC. As an organization in exile that was constantly threatened by the apartheid state, the ANC had developed extremely disciplined organizational structures, including clear lines of command
that proved far more effective in establishing its power in the transition period than the decentralization and flat organizational structures of civil society.

(Heller, 2009: 142)

This ‘had devastating consequences for ideological and organizational diversity represented by grassroots organizations affiliated to the UDF’ (Madlingozi, 2007: 85).

The ANC’s predispositions aligned well with the deeply-rooted hierarchical culture of the apartheid-era bureaucracy inherited by the new government:

Confronted with an unruly reality as they attempted to place their stamp on society after assuming office, government strategists who had expected office to confer the power to remake society often saw centralization and ‘co-ordination’ as a means of ensuring the predictability and certainty after which they hankered…These approaches, which were repeatedly buttressed by a public policy debate which repeatedly insisted that it is the prime function of government to ‘deliver’ to citizens rather than articulate their voice, imply that, because citizens value the fruits of ‘delivery’ more than intangibles such as voice or participation, the latter are at best a luxury to be enjoyed when they do not impede the technical supply of services, at worst a hindrance because the substitute talk for urgently required action.

(Friedman, 2005: 766–7)

In the context of a culture of ‘process compliance’, and in the face of the inevitable political pressures of patronage, ‘delivery’ has not worked out as planned. In consequence, there has indeed been something of a resurgence of civic activism. Perhaps unsurprisingly given South Africa’s history of political struggle, this activism has expressed itself principally through the oppositional discourse of ‘social movements’—a discourse which, in the early 2010s, earned South Africa something of a renewed reputation as ‘the protest capital of the world’.

10.4.3 Cumulative Incrementalism

The findings of this book pose a dilemma for education reform. At all levels (national, provincial, and school), the quality of governance is shown to have a strong influence on educational outcomes. But the observed governance patterns turn out to be shaped by the broader institutional and political context—with the potential for ‘fixing’ governance weaknesses constrained by that context. This final subsection suggests a way of dealing with this dilemma.
The suggested approach combines two complementary aspects of reform—practical initiatives which take into account the role of interests in constraining reform, plus a broader reframing of the ideas surrounding how the provision of education and other public services might be improved. The overall aim is to initiate a process which proceeds deliberately, and incrementally, maintaining stability, while cumulatively building momentum for re-orientating the system as a whole towards learning.

For many decades, South Africa’s education system has been buffeted by wave after wave of change. The 1976 uprising of school pupils initiated a grass-roots struggle for political change, with the slogan ‘no education before liberation’ characterizing at least part of the struggle. As Chapter 2 details, between 1994 and 1998, far-reaching institutional and fiscal transformations (unprecedented globally in their scope) were undertaken. Curriculum and pedagogical transformations also were set in motion, with adjustments (some major) continuing to 2012. Only since the mid-2000s could the new system be described as broadly stable—and there is some evidence that, with stability, outcomes are beginning to improve, albeit from an astonishingly low base. Table 10.4 illustrates, with data on South Africa’s performance in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); added information is provided in Chapters 2 and 7.

Table 10.4. TIMSS Performance—Provincial Comparisons Across Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>TIMSS 2003 (Gr 8 &amp; 9)</th>
<th>TIMSS 2011 (Gr. 9)</th>
<th>TIMSS 2015 (Gr. 9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average math. score</td>
<td>Average math. score</td>
<td>Average math. Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Cape</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauteng</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free State</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limpopo</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpumulanga</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Cape</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The risks are high that a new round of ‘transformational’ reform would short-circuit the process of consolidation, and reverse the limited gains which have been achieved. Indeed, experience the world over suggests that the longer-run impacts of ‘bold’ efforts to achieve reform by confronting vested interests (notably including teachers’ unions) can be highly uncertain. As Grindle (2004) shows for Latin America, such confrontations rarely result in ‘victory’, but instead usher in a period of considerable turbulence. The 2018 World Development Report takes a similarly cautious view. It contrasts reforms in Poland and in Chile. In Poland, large-scale changes in the structure of the education sector remained unpopular, with ongoing pressures to scrap them, notwithstanding evidence of success. In Chile, by contrast, incremental cumulative reforms over a decade, beginning in 1996, built strong momentum (p.278) for change, including support from the teachers’ union. Based on these and other experiences, the World Development Report concludes that:

A gradual, negotiated approach to reform may work better than confrontation. Where coalitions of system actors foster collaboration among shared goals, reforms are more likely to succeed...Even if evidence shows that the reforms improve learning, their sustainability is at risk when they are misunderstood or unpopular among system actors.

(2018: 204)

The evidence in this book points to a variety of practical, incremental reforms vis-à-vis both hierarchical and horizontal governance. For hierarchical governance, one crucial task is to continue to strengthen the ‘transmission belt’ through which emerging lessons about effective pedagogy are disseminated throughout the system. A second task is to fine-tune the interactions between the bureaucracy and SGBs in appointments processes, especially for school principals. In recent years, operating within the framework set by SASA, the WCED has introduced psychometric competency assessments for candidates for principal, used early retirement options to encourage principals in poorly-performing schools to retire, and ensured (informally) that successor principals in poorly performing schools come from outside the school. But note that efforts to use strengthened hierarchy to improve principal selection are likely to add value only in settings where hierarchy already works relatively well—in settings where hierarchies are more politicized, the consequence could simply be to
create new risks of school-level capture with patronage-oriented decision-making upstream in the bureaucracy.

Turning to horizontal governance, the findings in this book suggest that it can be a useful complement in settings where education bureaucracies are relatively capable—and can also be a value adding institutional substitute in settings where bureaucracies are dysfunctional. As discussed earlier, South Africa’s point of departure for leveraging the potential benefits of horizontal governance are more favourable than Grindle’s Latin American cases as it already has in place (via the 1996 Schools Act) an institutional architecture which fully empowers SGBs. What has been missing are efforts from either public sector or non-governmental stakeholders to breathe life into that architecture—especially in low-income communities which (given the country’s apartheid history and political struggle) lack experience of participatory, collaborative approaches to service provision.

How might such initiatives be designed? As the school-level case studies suggest, the core challenge is less one of ‘capacity’ than of empowering developmentally-oriented stakeholders at the school-level. Given the large number of schools, a school-by-school approach would be too demanding of the limited capacity available. An alternative might be to focus on interventions capable of influencing the dynamics of multiple schools in a more ‘wholesale’ way—linking developmentally-minded SGBs and other local stakeholders with one another, rather than working one-by-one. The aim would not be to transform all schools: in some schools, positive governance dynamics might already be in place; in others, predatory capture might be too powerfully locked-in to dislodge.

Experience in other countries points to a wide range of approaches through which countries have successfully worked at scale to improve participatory governance, with (as shown in some impact evaluations) a positive effect on learning outcomes. Some of these approaches focus directly on training parents and communities; others train trainers, with the process cascading down to the school level; others work with clusters of schools; and others focus on learning-by-doing, combining training with finance and support for implementation of small-scale school projects. What seemingly holds South Africa back from embracing approaches along these lines is their disjuncture with prevailing ideas as to what it takes for a society to successfully engage in the challenges of public service provision.

To complement the pragmatic reforms highlighted above, what might be the potential of broader reframing of the ideas surrounding how the provision of education and other public services can be improved? Such a reframing would re-engage from a pragmatic perspective, some of the participatory ideas which had currency in mid-1990s South Africa. Inevitably, the discussion is
somewhat speculative—but to provide both inspiration and a sense as to what
might be the possible impact on education it is helpful to look at experience
elsewhere, specifically that of Kenya.

A useful point of departure is the striking fact that, controlling for a variety of
exogenous factors, the performance of the Western Cape education system lags
substantially behind that of Kenya, notwithstanding the Western Cape having
almost five times the level of human resources. Figure 10.4 illustrates the extent
to which Kenya is a positive outlier. The country’s success can hardly be
attributed to the quality of its education bureaucracy: Kenya is notorious for its
high levels of corruption; patronage permeates the public sector. What seems to
have made the difference are the ‘softer’ dimensions of governance. Consider
the following description from a long-time practitioner/observer of the Kenyan
education system:

What one sees in rural Kenya is an expectation for kids to learn and be
able to have basic skills...Exam results are far more readily available in
Kenya than other countries in the region. The ‘mean scores’ for the Kenya
Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and equivalent KCSE at secondary
school are posted in every school and over time so that trends can be seen.
Head teachers are held accountable for those results (p.281) to the
extent of being paraded around the community if they did well, or literally
banned from school and kicked out of the community if they did badly.12

As Appendix A10.1 explores in detail, the roots of active civic
engagement in the education sector run deep in the
foundational ideas which
shaped modern Kenya: in a
decades-long effort to resist
British colonial influence; in the
vision of the country’s liberation
struggle leader and first
president, Jomo Kenyatta, of an
educated population as the
central manifestation what it
means to be a proud
independent nation; in the
inclusion of education as top
priority in the country’s first
national plan; and in an abiding
commitment in the first decade
of the country’s independence
to Harambee—‘self-help’—as

Note: The x-axis of the figure shows
predicted scores for 2007 on the
Southern African Consortium for
Monitoring Education Quality
(SACMEQ) test controlling for a
Source: Chapter 2
the pathway to development, with education holding pride of place within the Harambee movement. The contrast could not be starker between this Kenyan vision and the South African vision of service ‘delivery’ by government.

Against that backdrop, consider the call for ‘active citizenship’ in South Africa’s 2012 National Development Plan:

Active citizenship requires inspirational leadership at all levels of society… Leadership does not refer to one person, or even a tight collective of people. It applies in every aspect of life…To build an inclusive nation the country needs to find ways to promote a positive cycle, where an effective state, inspirational leadership across all levels of society, and active citizens reinforce and strengthen each other.

(The Presidency, National Planning Commission, 2012)

If South Africa were actually to embrace active citizenship as the path to improving outcomes, the consequences for the education system could be far-reaching. In many schools, an activated citizenry could decisively shift the balance between developmental and predatory actors in favour of the former. Within the bureaucracy, new momentum could emerge for learning-oriented engagement, surfacing the limits of pre-occupations with ‘process compliance’ for its own sake, or for fostering access without an explicit focus on actual learning. Teacher unions might increasingly embrace a vision of teaching as a profession, as a calling, and move decisively away from a narrow pre-occupation with the rights of teachers as employees. New possibilities would arise for adapting national policies in ways that enhance a focus on educational outcomes. Civil society activism might more systematically target those aspects of education-sector governance which have strong impacts on learning.

(p.282) The glow of South Africa’s political miracle has long faded. But as of the time of completing this book, it seems just possible that the country may perhaps be beginning to confront the reality that the end of apartheid was just one (giant) step along the path of meeting the challenge of inclusive, economic as well as political liberation for all. To move forward, South Africa could do much worse than—learning from Kenya at the time of its independence—putting education at the centre of a vision of people-centred development, in a way in which realizing the potential becomes the task of all of the country’s citizens. A top-down vision of ‘education for all’ is insufficient to meet the frontier challenge of improving outcomes. What is called for now is ‘all for education’.
This appendix provides some historical background to the assertion in the chapter that ‘soft governance’ accounts for Kenya being a positive outlier (at least through to 2007) relative to its Southern and East African comparators—with these soft governance strengths rooted in large part in the country’s struggle to shake off the shackles of colonialism. Four aspects of this struggle appear especially salient.

First, dating back to the 1920s, an independent schools movement had emerged as a weapon in resistance to colonial influence. Early resistance came from the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), founded in 1921 to protest against colonial land policies. Within a decade, education had become an effective new arena for struggle:

The Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (KISA), and the African Independent Pentecostal Church, which fused orthodox Christianity with Kikuyu tribal traditions, became the focal points for the growing anti-European feeling of young Africans...Legal means of getting their rights—the endless unsuccessful lawsuits and the pointless petitions the government ignored—had been fruitless and frustrating. The law was a dead end: the settlers and the colonial administration were too strong and were set against them. Now they had a platform based on culture and religion, and the public was ready to move. The new schools and the new church bred others; another school movement and another church group, even more militant and aggressive, formed in competition. But if they couldn’t agree with each other, they all agreed in opposing the missions. In the next couple of years the effects were spectacular. The KCA’s inflammatory speeches drew natives away from the mission schools and congregations in droves. The Church of Scotland mission in Kikuyu province lost 90% of its members, and the Africa Inland Mission even more.

(Wepman, 1985: 47-8)

Following World War Two, conflict between the independent schools movement and the colonial authorities erupted afresh, culminating in the forced closure of the (p.283) schools (which were perceived to be a source of the Mau Mau rebellion) for much of the 1950s (Wepman, 1985; Fischer, 1977).

Second, the personal history of Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya’s first president and a major figure in the country’s liberation struggle) was deeply intertwined with education as a form of resistance:

• Born in the 1890s, he was educated in mission schools.
• In the 1920s, he became active in the KCA, which (building on his mission school experience, and fluency in English) he used as a
platform to advocate for better-quality education for Africans, within a framework of cultural nationalism.

- Upon returning to Kenya in the later 1940s (after fifteen years living in Europe) to take up leadership of the Kenya African Union (later the ruling party, KANU), he also became director and principal of the Kenya African Teachers College, founded by his brother-in-law, and run by the independent schools movement (Fischer, 1977).
- He was jailed in 1952, and released in 1961 resuming active leadership of KANU, becoming the first president of independent Kenya in December, 1963.

Third, education emerged as among the very top early priorities of independent Kenya. Thus:

In 1964, a special Education Commission was established to review how the education system could be used to build national identity, encourage racial and ethnic intermixing and support development.

(Hornsby, 2012)

Education featured centrally in Kenya’s 1966 development plan, which asserted that ‘education is more than simply preparation for the university or training for clerical jobs. Our farmers need education and so do the workers’ (Fischer, 1977: ii–iii).

Fourth, in June 1963, Kenyatta offered a vision of an independent Kenya imbued with Harambee (‘let us pull together’) (Kenyatta, 1964); in December, the country adopted the term as its official national motto. By the early 1980s, over 20,000 Harambee associations had registered with government; these associations had become ‘the principal vehicle through which local communities exerted claims on the state…the most important arena of rural political life... Over time, the emergence of Harambee, combined with the regular holding of elections, established a measure of national political accountability by linking state and society together’. (Barkan, 1994: 19). Engagement with education held pride of place within the Harambee movement:

In an upsurge of protest, Africans mobilized during colonial rule to launch an underground educational movement in order to vie for increased social power and status. This movement latter became known as the Harambee school movement...Harambee or self-help schools became a vital aspect of Kenya’s secondary school system.

(Dinavo, 1990: 4)

Harambee was not just a political slogan, a rallying point, or an idea looking for an occasion to manifest itself. For education in particular,
Harambee had a meaning all of its own; it was a very influential reality, especially in the area of secondary education...Politicians, concerned with their public image and their re-electability, yielded to public demands for more education... Available funds were running short... The demand and pressure for more schools continued to grow. In this spiral of conflict between demand and ability to supply, Kenyatta’s call for Harambee—let’s pull together—seemed to contain the answer.

(Fischer, 1977: 81-3)

Along with the above, two subsequent developments must also be noted. One is the introduction in 1978 of the standardized countrywide test, the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, under the leadership of Kenyatta’s successor Daniel Arap Moi, himself a former schoolteacher; this test provided the information platform through which communities hold school staff to account, as described in the body of the chapter. The second is the repeated pressure for free primary education, which culminated in a new policy in 2003 which went beyond exhortation and banned the imposition of school levies and other cost-sharing mechanisms (Somerset, 2009). The policy resulted in a sudden increase in the number of pupils; Grade 1 enrolments rose from 970,000 in 2002 to 1.3 million in 2003. But it also had the unintended consequence of reducing the commitment of parents to schools, resulting in a subsequent exit of children to low-fee private schools (Bold et al., 2010).

References

Bibliography references:


Piper, B., 9 January 2017, Personal communication.


Notes:


(2) In South Africa, public education dominates, both historically and to the present day; as of 2015, about 95 per cent of school-going children were enrolled in the public system.

(3) As detailed in Chapter 8, in the Western Cape, outcomes were measured by trends in school-level systemic tests conducted by the WCED. In the Eastern Cape no parallel test results were available; trends in enrolment were used as a proxy.

(4) Both the trend in numbers of students and area feedback (and visual observation during fieldwork) identify the school as a relatively strong performer locally. But given the vast disparities between average performance in the Eastern and Western Cape, there is no basis for extrapolating this relative success into absolutely strong performance in relation to schools in low-income areas in both provinces.

(5) However, for reasons explored throughout this section, all of this evidence should be interpreted through Pritchett’s (2015:7) dictum that ‘pretty much everything everyone believes is the key element of better schools has, by now, been rigorously disproved to have an impact on student learning somewhere. Of course, many of these same notions have also been rigorously proven to have an impact on student learning’.

Tzu Lyn Phang provided the background research for Malaysia. The Malaysian reforms are: the 1997 Malaysia Smart School Project; the 2003 curriculum, English in the Teaching of Mathematics and Science; the 2006 National Education Blueprint; the 2011–15 new Standard Primary School Curriculums, and the 2013 Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–25, with the latter part of the broader Big Fast Results initiative facilitated by the Performance Management and Delivery Unit established in the Prime Minister’s office; there currently is optimism that the last of these might yield better results than the earlier efforts.

Sarah Kouhlani-Nolla provided the background research for Morocco. One reform was initiated in 1999 shortly after King Mohammed VI came to power, when a new Ministry of National Education was established and initiated curricular, pedagogical and examination changes under the rubric of a National Charter of Education. Disappointment with the results led to the launch in 2009 of a National Education Emergency Plan. Disappointment with this effort led to a new reform initiative in 2012, and then a new long-term, fifteen-year perspective, launched in 2015 by the Ministry of National Education.

For this point, see also Hoadley, Christie, and Ward (2009).

The quote is from Habib (2013: 60); see also Madlingozi (2007).

Among programmes implemented at scale, Ghana provides an example of direct training support (Social Impact, 2014); Guinea of a training of trainers approach (Garnier et al., 2005; Midling et al., 2006); Haiti (American Institutes for Research, 2001; 2004) and Nigeria (Healey, 2016) examples of cluster-based approaches; and Honduras (World Bank, 2009) of an approach which combine training with finance and support for implementation of small-scale school projects. Bruns, Filmer, and Patrinos (2011) synthesize the results of the impact evaluations of a rich array of approaches to strengthen school-level transparency and participatory management, some robust (but small-scale) randomized controlled trials, and other interventions at scale.

Personal communication, 9 January 2017 from Benjamin Piper, RTI Senior Director of Africa Education, based in Nairobi, Kenya. Quoted by permission. In an econometric analysis, Bold et al. (2010) show that high levels of parental and community support were indeed associated with persistently better support in the KCPE exams.

This appendix draws on very useful background research by Sarah Pfund, plus helpful informal inputs from David Throup.