

# URUNANA RW'ABAREZI

ISSUE 02 APRIL 2016

*The Impact of parental involvement in Education*



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**GASANA Janvier**

## FOREWORD

### **Dear Reader,**

Welcome to the second issue of *Urunana rw'Abarezi*, our magazine on Professional Learning Networks for School Leaders.

A first cohort of 30 professional learning networks for school leaders are now practicing what they learned and have become proactively operational.

We have received positive feedback and impact stories from some of those who read the first issue and who participated in the initial trainings. The stories are very encouraging.

Professional peers now have the opportunity to share their experiences and to practically learn from one another on various concepts. School leaders are now sharing best practices and are thinking together on how to deal with challenges in an effective way. This will definitely be very helpful in improving the quality of education.

In that perspective, we are very happy to announce that a second cohort of 90 SEOs is now participating in a series of workshops on PLNs coaching. Therefore, in the upcoming months, 90 more PLNs will also become operational and will offer the same opportunities to school leaders as described above.

Learning from each other in a professional way also requires a platform where experiences can be shared. Hence the release of this new issue of *Urunana rw'Abarezi* magazine.

The first edition offered various key theories and concepts on PLNs. It also featured relevant testimonies and stories from SEOs and Head teachers.

In this second edition, a lot of emphasis was put on parental involvement in education. We all know the value of an excellent collaboration between teachers, school leaders and parents. Furthermore, we know that this level of collaboration is absolutely necessary in order to achieve excellent learning results from our students.

Since schools design and implement effective strategies at different paces, this cooperation may not be achieved in the same way or at the same level. So this is definitely an area requiring our care and focus with learning opportunities from each other's best practices.

This magazine features articles that offer interesting examples of parental and community involvement in our country. It also gives us the opportunity to hear from some of our valued educational partners on this very theme.

As mentioned earlier, our goal is to turn this magazine into an open space for you to share and discuss the challenges you are encountering as you strive to achieve excellence in education and the solutions you are developing to solve the problems. Hearing your valuable experiences will highly contribute to the development of this platform for the good of Professional Learning Networks.

Sincerely,  
**GASANA Janvier**  
 Director General, Rwanda Education Board

# FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

It is generally believed that teachers' and head teachers' play is a determining role in the development of quality education. However, when it comes to students learning achievements, one cannot underestimate the great impact of parents' role and the local community engagement. This is why 'parental involvement' is the main theme of this issue of *Urunana rw'Abarezi* magazine.

In this issue, you will hear from the Head of the Teacher Development and Management Department (TDM) of the Rwanda Education Board (REB), Mr. Peter Damian NTAGANZWA, who shared with us his reflections on the importance of the collaboration between schools and parents. In the same vein, another article written by Desire MUNYEMANA from the School Leadership and Management Unit at REB, will depict six important steps through which parental involvement can be fostered.

In her article, Mary Sugrue, the Technical Director at the Education Development Center's Literacy, Language and Learning programme (EDC/L3), illustrates best literacy and reading practices by underlining the pivotal role of both leaders and parents in the promotion of literacy development. Mary believes that for students to be successful readers, they should read not only in the classroom, but also at home and in their communities. Parental involvement is important. In the same line of thought, powerful impact stories and testimonies are shared in this issue to emphasise the importance of consistent parental involvement. These living stories reflect the genuine perspectives of some of our

partners who serve as school leaders, or Sector education officers, or parents' representatives.

In this issue as well, we hear from Wellspring Foundation, which is one of our key education partners active in Gasabo District. Through the voice of their staff member Vedaste Byombi, we are taken through one of the key pillars of Wellspring's holistic School Development Programme, namely the Community Involvement component. The approach is rich, encouraging and inspiring.

Since Professional Learning Networks of school leaders proved to be highly efficient in facilitating and allowing the sharing of best practices on how effective school leadership can positively impact the involvement of parents, the existence of an article explaining the functioning of PLNs in light of previous visits of some PLNs in action will be helpful as well.

Finally, you will find some short but inspiring testimonies gathered among SEOs in response to the previous edition's content.

It is our true hope that reading this magazine will be an enjoyable experience!

We warmly invite you all to share your thoughts and experiences with us. Write to [plnrwanda@gmail.com](mailto:plnrwanda@gmail.com)

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# STORIES FROM OUR READERS



## Phoebe's Story

For five years, Phoebe KAMPIRE has served as the Sector Education Officer of Rugarama, Burera District. She has previously taught as a primary teacher since 1994 and later, following her training at University of Rwanda College of Education (former KIE), she also had the privilege to teach as a secondary teacher.

### Here's what she had to say:

*"I learned a lot in this first issue of Urunana rw'Abarezi. I discovered that the idea of Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) is a very great thing. I understood that some of the challenges we face as educators cannot be easily addressed using the usual individual methods! One of the challenges that I can give as an example of how applying PLNs was helpful, was an*

*issue of teacher behavior management I have been struggling with for a certain time. So I decided to invite some of his peer teachers and I also brought in some head teachers in my sector so that we can use our collective wisdom. The outcome was very positive and fruitful. On another occasion, I applied the PLN principle in attempting to understand why one of our schools was continuously having a poor performing P6 class. We decided to create some spaces for discussions between students from the poor performing class and those from the top performing classes. In their interactions, they shared ideas and thoughts and the results were remarkable. So all this sparked in me a strong desire to develop a deeper understanding of PLNs. I have been particularly encouraged by the stories from Sector Education Officers Deogratias and Cecile who encountered challenges and hardship as new leaders in their Sectors but who overcame those obstacles by using PLN resources. I realized that I can also access the*

*same resources and use them to resolve some problems in my sector. Urunana rw'Abarezi Magazine is a great opportunity to take the PLN knowledge beyond one sector. This magazine will help all educators in our Country to find out more on PLNs and especially educators who have not had the chance to be directly trained on PLNs. We hope that more educators, even at the district level will be trained to ensure that this knowledge is spread".*



## Eugene's story

Gahamanyi Eugene has served as a social affairs officer of Mayange Sector in Bugesera District before being appointed Sector Education Officer in 2012.

### Here's what he had to say:

*"In reading Urunana magazine and following the training on PLNs,*

*I realized that PLN is a wonderful way to facilitate sharing of experiences and knowledge among peer educators like SEOs, Head teachers, or teachers toward the development of quality education. This learning method can allow schools that are struggling to learn from those that are performing well. It will also improve communications by encouraging sharing and more interactions. So this magazine is a powerful way to transfer this knowledge because it includes very important and helpful concepts. The magazine is written in a straight forward way and this will be helpful to readers who have not had the privilege to be physically trained on PLNs.*

*We learned from REB/VVOB trainings best leadership habits and practices that can lead to positive change in schools. So if educators overcome communication barriers and are willing to share and to learn from one another, more progress can be achieved. So I hope that this magazine will be widely disseminated to ensure that the concept of PLNs is embraced everywhere among educators and school leaders in Rwanda”.*



#### **Innocent’s story**

Innocent SINDIKUBWABO has been working as an educator for more than 5 years. Prior to becoming Sector Education Officer of Rumbura Sector in Nyabihu district, Innocent served as a 9YBE teacher and head teacher.

#### **Here’s what he had to say:**

*“I learned about the existence of Urunana rw’Abarezi Magazine as I visited REB website. I enjoyed the topic featured in the magazine. I liked the article on collective responsibility and collaboration since it demonstrates that when we work as a team we achieve many things that we could not have achieved had we worked in isolation and individually. I learned that focusing on team success should be the primary priority of an educator. I realized that some school leaders are happy when their schools perform well while other schools are having a poor performance record. This concept of collective*

*responsibility and collaboration encourages school leaders and educators to be proactive in supporting each other so that everybody can be successful. It was therefore a great pleasure to be invited to attend the training on PLNs facilitated by VVOB and REB. The training emphasized how educators and school leaders can work as a team to ensure that learning outcomes are achieved successfully”.*



#### **Illuminee’s story**

Illuminee Ryamukuru Dusabimana serves as SEO of Ntarama Sector in Bugesera district for now 3 years. Before that, she has been a secondary teacher for up to 4 years.

#### **Here’s what she had to say:**

*“The magazine is wonderful. I liked it. It illustrates how people with similar responsibilities share their experience and how they help each other to grow. I realized that we all need one another; we all need to share our*

experience. I also realized that sharing of knowledge and experience creates a great impact since all the parties learn from each other. This magazine will allow SEOs to understand how they can support Head teachers to improve their schools and to foster quality education. We face many different challenges in education. Therefore, hearing from others' experience through this magazine will give more resources to those who are struggling. I hope that this magazine will help us increase our knowledge through the various articles and stories it contains".



#### **Marie Jeanne's story**

Marie Jeanne URAMUTSE is the Sector Education Officer of Mugina Sector, in the district of Kamonyi.

#### **Here's what she had to say:**

"It is amazing to realize how anyone can become a source of knowledge. This has been an exciting discovery I made as I read the Urunana rw'Abarezi

Magazine. There was a time where I used to think that only some Head teachers or particular people could be well placed to provide advice or input that can help develop solutions. But I was wrong. Every person should never be despised or neglected. The greatest thing about Urunana rw'Abarezi Magazine is that it includes testimonies, and relevant examples that will help the readers overcome challenges encountered in education. Questions like "Are there some people who overcame the same challenges I am going through?" will find relevant answers in this kind of magazine. I really encourage the continuation of this magazine. I hope it will be largely disseminated to ensure that the peer learning among school leaders is emphasized and encouraged through various stories and testimonies found in the magazine".

# THE NECESSITY OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

## Reflections from the Head of the REB Teacher Development Management (TDM), Mr. Peter Damian NTAGANZWA

Prior to becoming the Head of the Teacher Development and Management Department (TDM) of the Rwanda Education Board (REB) in July 2011, Mr. Peter Damian Ntaganzwa served as a Principal of RUKARA College of education. As an educator and as a leader, Mr. Ntaganzwa has joined a deep and noticeable knowledge and mastery of the Rwanda Education System, especially in the arena of teacher empowerment and school leadership. Being at the head of this very important department, Mr. Ntaganzwa has been at the forefront in the development of teachers' management structures, teachers' development policies, and relevant strategies for sustainable performance.

*"Teachers are key players in the implementation of any education Strategy. So we cannot afford to*

*ignore or minimise the importance of teacher development" said Mr. Ntaganzwa Damian during an interview held recently with "Urunana" Magazine. But it is not only the role of the teacher that is underlined. The Head of the TDM also believes that parental involvement is crucial in the life of the school.*

*"It is well known that parental involvement in education is more than important" Damian said. In any healthy school, parents are involved in the learning of their children, in the teaching, and in the management of the school. It has been proved that wherever parents are involved in the management of the school, there is a higher probability of having great learning outcomes and better results.*

*"There has to be a coherence of involvement: a school is a place where children learn. But it*

*is also a place where parents and teachers work together to ensure that children receive the best quality education", he insisted.*

*"Traditionally, the learning outcomes have been left to the discretion of teachers alone. But, with time, it became obvious that parental involvement is required not only in the school management but also in the infrastructure development and the pedagogical systems. Issues related to children performance, textbooks, dropout, lateness, absenteeism, etc. cannot be addressed without the unfailing support of parents.*

*"Depending on the age and their particular context, it is important to have a regular and consistent healthy communication between the parents and the teachers."*

Mr. Ntanganzwa encourages parents not to limit their focus to childhood education. "Parents tend to be very involved in the education of their children when they are still young. But, as the children grow older and become adolescents, parents will need to solicit the collaboration of their children in order to better understand their needs, their struggles, their shortcomings."

With the existing 2012 Law on School General Assemblies/Committees (SGAs/SGACs), and the upcoming corresponding ministerial order, parents are offered more breathing room to support schools:

"SGACs are structured in a way that Head Teachers do not influence parents' decisions. We have witnessed some situations where head teachers thought that they could take advantage of parents' ignorance or their social conditions to manipulate their decisions regarding the school management. We therefore hope

that with the upcoming ministerial order, this poor pattern will be prevented and parents will strengthen their involvement especially in the schools' financial accountability. This will also encourage the sense of ownership with the Government Support," said Mr. Ntanganzwa.

The Head of the TDM underlines the importance of valuing the individual contributions from each parent: "It is amazing to see how the community is increasingly taking more responsibility with regard to the schools affairs. This is a tremendous opportunity for the school to access various talents, skills and gifts from the community. I believe that consistent parental involvement in schools will increase attendance at schools, improve discipline, teacher motivation and children's self-esteem. And as it has been the case in some places, it will also have a great impact on a number of significant projects such as school fencing, Computer labs, science

labs, school libraries, micro finance and other social initiatives", added Mr. Ntanganzwa.

In order to be successful in the mobilization of parents and the community, the empowerment of school leaders and of local government education officers is vital. "Only well trained school leaders can better understand the importance of involving parents in what is going on in their school. Therefore, their continual training is a must. Also, both sector and district education officers should be catalysts in helping SGAs and SGACs learn from their peers."

"As the learning expert Jim Kwik said: 'if an egg is broken by outside force, life ends. If broken by inside force, life begins. Great things always begin from inside'. I strongly believe that the potential found in the collaborative action of both parents and school leaders is a powerful opportunity for a positive change from the 'inside'".

# WORKING WITH PARENTS TO BUILD A BETTER SCHOOL FOR ALL

## A story from Groupe Scolaire Karama, Kigali Sector

Groupe Scolaire Karama is located in a rural part of Nyarugenge District known as Kigali Sector. Visiting for the first time, one is immediately struck by the order and the discipline that reign in the school of close to 3,400 students: the school facilities are clean, neat and orderly.

Groupe Scolaire Karama is led by Mr. François NIYOYITA whose declared vision is to transform the school into one of the best rural public schools of Nyarugenge District. François initially joined Groupe Scolaire Karama in 2008 as a teacher and became Head Teacher three years later. He speaks openly of his love for his work: "I feel proud of what our school has achieved. But I am also very grateful for the opportunity to serve and to mature as a leader".

In François' view, parents have played a crucial role in the development of the school: "All the good we have achieved as a school is as a result

*of the collaboration between parents, the school leadership and local government. Partnership with parents is always needed. No school can have lasting and consistent success if parents are not involved in the leadership decisions of the school".*

*"Thanks to the parents' involvement in school management and leadership, GS Karama has improved considerably. 96% of our students succeeded in the last national exams. The environment has become more conducive to teaching and learning. Parents also concretely support the cleaning of the school."*

The Head Teacher of GS Karama further explained that the school organises regular meetings with parents to ensure that they are well informed of the school's needs and to ensure that they contribute in the decision-making of the school: "We need to have smooth and consistent communication

with parents if we want them to be seriously and actively involved in their children's learning".

According to Mr. Niyoyita, there are specific key areas that have particularly benefitted from the involvement of parents: "We are grateful for the support of the parents in making the school feeding programme possible. Most of our parents back the programme financially. And those with limited means have volunteered to provide farming services to ensure that the school feeding programme succeeds.

Parents have also been instrumental in setting up a new computer lab. Having a computer lab was among the school's top priorities but our limited resources could not allow us to have one." Parents have also been involved in helping the school leadership remove some of the obstacles to students' performance.

*"One of the major challenges we have*

constantly been trying to prevent is dropout. We wanted to make sure that children's family life and personal difficulties do not lead them to leave school. We wanted to make sure that all our children are safeguarded and that they all make it to the end. But to be honest, this would have been impossible if parents were not involved and willing to participate in the school's affairs" Francois explained.

School General Assemblies Committees (SGACs) have also been very effective in helping the school accomplish its mission.

*"At Groupe Scolaire Karama, we consider SGAC to be real assets. They do not exist to fulfil any kind of formality. We believe that success depends on*

*real collaboration, built around well-structured parental involvement in school matters. And this is being mostly achieved through the SGACs. These Committees strengthen parental involvement by allowing everyone to be informed of the status and the priorities of the school. Moreover, they are structured in a way that does not allow school leaders to influence anyone on any important point of decision-making",* added the school leader. Like the renowned business coach Jim Collins, François Niyoyita believes that *"the good is the enemy of the great"*. And the impact of any success can vanish if one becomes complacent and content with the status quo. Hence the importance of improving practices by learning from others: *"We thank VVOB for empowering our*

*school leaders in using Professional Learning Networks (PLNs). We expect that PLNs will be very helpful in allowing schools to learn best practices in how to work with parents. We have to encourage unity rather than adversity or competition since we all have one aim: to give to our children access to quality education",* he said.



*"All the good we have achieved as a school is as a result of the collaboration between parents, the school leadership and local government.*

# BEST PRACTICES OF LITERACY LEADERS: HOW DO HEAD TEACHERS SUCCESSFULLY LEAD LITERACY LEARNING?

The role of head teacher as administrator, manager and leader, is of a great responsibility. Today, all professions require continual professional learning. “Effective leadership is essential to the development and continued improvement of a school”, explains Mujawamariya Odette, the head teacher of Remera Catholic School. “Reading and writing is the cornerstone for all learning. Pupils who struggle with reading often have more difficulty in other subjects” she says. “As a head teacher, you must ensure that all students become good readers and writers.”

Promoting leadership practices is a key component of the Literacy, Language, and Learning (L3) Initiative, which aims to enhance teaching and learning so that children leave primary school with solid literacy and numeracy skills. Funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Education Development

Center (EDC), L3 works closely with the Rwanda Education Board (REB) on the development of teaching and learning materials, teacher professional development, English language support, and school-community partnerships. Currently, more than 2,400 schools nationwide are using REB / L3’s instructional and learning materials. As part of successful implementation of the program, L3 has identified practices which lead to successful school leadership for strong reading outcomes.

## **Establishing goals and expectations**

The head teacher plays an important role in realizing the literacy vision of a school through its actual implementation in classrooms. Ms Nyirankuriyinka Adrie, head teacher of GS Gitega, Nyarugenge District, and her team established clear goals and expectations for their school. “As a team we agreed that all pupils deserve a strong start. In our staff meetings, we

agreed that our goal was to help pupils to learn to read at grade level as early as possible after entering school—and to maintain grade-level reading. We would also regularly assess pupils’ progress to respond to extra support needs and to help struggling readers”

## **Resourcing strategically**

Mr. Kayijire Florent from Biti Primary School, Nyamabuye Sector, Muhanga District, leads his school in availing resources to support literacy teaching and learning. “The L3 materials are a great foundation for literacy teaching and learning. To support our learners we established a classroom library, so every child could access additional reading materials. We also identified the visual aids needed in the classrooms to create a rich environment for pupils. Each classroom now has alphabet charts and word walls. We also track what the pupils are reading at home,” he says.

### **Having regular dialogue with team members**

Kayijire Florent and Nyirankuriyinka Adrie highlight the importance of regular dialogue with the teaching staff. *"It is important to develop positive relationships in staffrooms,"* Adrie explains. *"It was important for me to understand what the teachers know about literacy, how it is learnt and how to teach it? I wanted to create a community of practice in my school. I wanted teachers to feel that they could share what they know but also what they didn't know. The open dialogue among the teachers helped us identify our learning needs and opportunities. It also gave us opportunities to solve problems and to share best practices"*

### **Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development**

Through these dialogues, head teachers identify professional development needs for both teachers and themselves. "The L3 materials contained substantial information on early grade reading and learning. Some of this was new information for me too," says Ms. Uwineza Bernadette, head teacher at GS Busanza, Kicukiro. "I attended training on the use of L3 materials. I was then able

to provide my teachers with an orientation and then work with the school-based mentor to organise CPD training with the entire teaching staff. Few weeks later, we were familiar with the new teaching and learning practices. This enabled me to feel confident to visit the classroom and assess the new practices implementation."

### **Involving Parents**

For students to be successful readers, they should read not only in the classroom, but also at home and in their communities. Parental involvement is important. At Ruli Catholique Primary School in Muhanga district, Head Teacher Kambibi Mathlidi works closely with her school's School General Assembly Committee (SGAC). In September, she worked with the SGAC president, parent Nyandwi Jean Claude, to organize a school-wide reading competition to mark International Literacy Day.

SGAC members attended the event, where children performed dramas with literacy messages. During the reading competition, a panel composed of parents and teachers, used marking sheets to select the best reader. The SGAC president also sensitized parents about the importance of

supporting their children to become successful readers.

### **Engaging in constructive problem talk**

A strong collaboration among head teachers is key to solving problems identified at the school level, suggests the SEO of Kabaya Sector, Ngororero district, Jean Claude Tuyishime. He regularly meets with head teachers to discuss school progress in literacy and numeracy. When challenges arise, the head teachers discuss possible solutions or propose alternative ideas. Tuyishime also invites guest speakers like the L3 Regional Coordinator for question and answer sessions. *"These sessions are very informative,"* explains Jean Claude Nshimiyimana, the L3 Regional Coordinator after attending a session in Tuyishime's sector. *"The head teachers share their experience on how they are successfully implementing the programme in their own context."* By implementing these best leadership practices, head teachers are not only ensuring the success of their school. They are ultimately supporting the development of each student into a confident, successful reader.

Mary Sugrue EDC

# THE POWER OF PARENTS GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES

## A story from Group Scolaire Muko, Rusizi

Jean Marie Bushayija volunteers as president (Chair) of the Group Scolaire Muko Parents General Assembly Committee (SGAC) also known as Parents Teachers Committee (PTC). The school is located in in Bugarama Sector in the district of Rusizi.

As the chair of the most influential Muko School's leadership body, Jean Marie was pleased to share with Urunana rw'Abarezi magazine's readers his story and his perspective on the involvement of parents and the community into schools matters.

In describing the nature of the collaboration between the school leadership and the parents, Jean Marie explained how the parents in his community are engaged in the development and the management of their school:

*"We have managed to ensure that the school has an inclusive School Parents Committee that includes school leaders*

*like the Head Teacher, teachers' representative, and students' representatives in order to ensure that we cultivate collective wisdom by fostering the responsibility and the ownership from all the stakeholders including parents, teachers, school leaders and also students. We regularly meet to ensure that we collect the input from parents toward the development of the school. Therefore, parents' opinion through the School parents' committee is considered whether it is about their participation in the assessment of issues faced by the school or in offering long term solutions to areas needing improvement"* said the Parent teachers committee's leader.

Jean Marie also shares some key areas where the parental involvement has been very determining and critical to the development of the school:

*"Today in Bugarama, parents provide support to schools in various areas including school*

*infrastructures, classrooms equipment, and school fences. At many occasions, parents have also supplemented the limited school capitation grants and the teachers' low salaries to ensure that quality education is not endangered by a poor teacher's motivation"* said the parent.

Jean Marie also revealed some good practices to encourage other parents committees from other schools that may still be struggling with the same issues. Despite the many financial obstacles, parents worked together and collaborated with the school in addressing crucial matters. One of them is the issue of school feeding for the 9 and 12 years basic education:

*"There was a time when some students could not eat. This led some to become bitter, and the learning environment was not really commendable. Quality education was seriously at stake. Through the collective wisdom from the parents and the school leadership,*

*we explored solutions to eradicate the issue. We were able to ensure that all the students get the basic food they need and we encourage a culture of sharing the little that we have. Today no child is left unfed despite the limited resources since parents do not have equal capabilities”.*

In addition to supplementing the low incomes of teachers, parents also supported the learning and the teaching efforts of the teachers by monitoring and following up their children when they return home from school. As a result of this commitment, Bugarama sector is among the top performing sectors of the Rusizi district:

*“This is the result of the substantial involvement of parents who are willing to support their children at home by helping them to review their lessons when they are at home” said Jean Marie.*

But all these achievements are not to be taken for granted. And Jean Marie does not hesitate to warn against any risk of complacency:

*“We still have to continue to encourage parents to continue and to increase their involvement in the education of their children. We have encountered cases where some parents did not even know their children’s teachers! Parents live in different contexts and face different life challenges.*

*Yet, it is important as parents and as educators that we always work together to avoid this kind of passivity that can lead to such a poor pattern. I call each parent to own the learning of his/her children. Formal education at school should be supplemented by parental care and follow up at home. I encourage school leaders not to stop the good work in fostering Quality Education and to keep involving parents. School leaders should handle their schools like their own homes. I also ask key Development partners like REB and VVOB to continue their support to schools as they strive to address some challenges and to develop homegrown solutions like school feeding programmes”.*



# SCHOOL, PARENTS AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY: AN OVERLAPPING SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Research recognizes parental involvement as an important factor in a child quality education. Joyce Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Model is viewed as a leading parental involvement model among researchers. The model redefines the relationship between schools, families, and communities as an overlapping sphere of influence that share a concern about the success of the child. As a framework for increasing parental participation in education, the model recognizes six types of educational involvement and encourages schools to develop activities that engage schools, families and communities. The model has been influential in shaping social policies on parental involvement in education.

## Overview

Parental involvement is seen as a significant factor in improving a child's quality education. Therefore, understanding how parents can help their children as well as the role of schools leaders in encouraging parental involvement, have been among key research aims in education and in sociology.

## Spheres

The first inclusive sphere (see image below) depicts the partnership of schools, families, and communities as overlapping spheres. The spheres mean that schools, families, and communities all have a crucial role in the education of a child. The

overlap (the intersection) of the spheres means that the interests and influences of the stakeholders in a child's education are mutual.

There are two factors that influence the level of overlapping spheres: they are time and experiences.



That is, the time spent at school by a child, his age, and his family experiences are reflective of the level of the mutual involvement of the school, the family

and the community in his education.. As an example, the child's age often determines the level of his/her parents involvement in his/her

education. Usually parents seem to be interested in their child's education when they are still younger.

The second Component of the Partnership Model that refer to experience, illustrates the interpersonal relationships and patterns of influence that are the most important in a child's education. According to the model, there are two types of interactions: the interaction between schools and families, and the interaction between parents and teachers. The child is the primary beneficiary of the outcome of these interactions following a process of sharing and discussions toward the improvement of the child's learning outcomes.

### **Six Types of Involvement**

A key partnership research goal has been to identify the right actions from schools, families, and communities toward students learning. Six general types of involvement have been identified:

#### **Type 1 - Parenting:**

Parenting includes any activity aimed at raising happy, healthy children, who will become capable students. Unlike teachers whose influence on a child is relatively limited, parents maintain a life-long commitment to their children. Activities that support this type of involvement provide

information to parents about their child's development, health, safety, or home conditions in view of student learning.

#### **Type 2 - Communicating:**

Families and schools communicate with each other in various ways. Schools notify parents on important events and activities through letters or flyers. Parents inform teachers about their child's health and educational history. In some cases, a school website may be an additional mode of communication between parents and families through the updated online school calendar and announcements. (Piper, 2012).

From a positive involvement perspective, communication must be two-way — from schools to parents and from parents to schools — to be most effective.

#### **Type 3 -Volunteering:**

There are three main ways offered to individuals desiring to volunteer in education. Firstly, they may volunteer in a school by helping school leaders and teachers as tutors or assistants. Secondly, they may help in fundraising for an event or in promoting a community school. Finally, they may be involved as a member of an audience, by attending school programs or performances.

#### **Type 4 - Learning At**

**Home:** When parents help their children on their homework or when they take them to visit a museum, they are fulfilling their home educational duties . These activities produce a school-like family and encourage parents to interact with the school curriculum. Activities that encourage learning at home will help parents access information on children's activities in classrooms, allowing them to be more helpful in their homework.

#### **Type 5 - Decision making:**

Parents are involved in schools decision making when they participate in school governance committees or when they join structures like School General Assemblies and School General Assembly Committees. Other decision making activities include taking on leadership roles that involve disseminating information to other parents.

#### **Type 6 - Collaborating with the Community:**

This is about coordinating the community resources and services for students, families, and schools along with relevant businesses and agencies as well as other associations interested in serving the community.

# PARENTAL CONTRIBUTION IN STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

## A perspective from Lucie NIYINDAGIYE, Bugarama Sector Education Officer

For 3 years, Lucie Niyindagiye has been serving as the Sector Education Officer of Bugarama Sector in the District of Rusizi. Being in charge of the implementation of the education policies in the sector, she ensures that all the 8,325 students of the 6 schools of the sector receive substantial quality education by involving all the stakeholders and the community.

Lucie commended the community in her sector for allowing a smooth collaboration between all the stakeholders: *"We have experienced, in the past, tensions between parents and school leaders on matters pertaining to school management or students learning and teaching. Today the level of the collaboration is high and the communication is smooth. And this is especially due to the great contributions of parents in the Schools General Assembly Committees as well as the Committees that oversee the financial management and ensure accountability.*

*Lucie was willing and proud to share with Urunana rw'Abarezi readers some accomplishments that can be referred to as an encouragement to those who are still struggling with the same issues":*

*"For over 3 years, I am an eyewitness of the results from the good collaboration between parents and school leaders. As a result of this commendable attitude from all the stakeholders, quality education was substantially achieved. Despite the many challenges we face as a sector, today Bugarama sector is for five consecutive times the top performing sector of the district. This is the result of parents' efforts and their involvement in their children's education" said Lucie.*

*"In the previous years, we suffered from increased dropouts and absenteeism in most of our schools. So we decided to bring parents in the discussions and together, we explored ways to address this. As a result of parents'*

*involvement, dropouts and absenteeism were controlled and reduced considerably. And student performance increased remarkably.*

*Lucie does not restrict the role of parents to learning and teaching of students: "When I first arrived here, our schools were very old and bad looking. Today, as a result of the parents' investment, we have well developed classrooms following the decision and the commitment from parents to supplement the low school budget for infrastructure development. Parents have also displayed a deep interest in the students' well-being by investing in school feeding programmes"*

*Behavior management and discipline are also key aspects of quality education that have not been ignored by parents: Unwanted pregnancies and lack of discipline were among the issues we faced in previous years. We solicited parents input and wisdom to address these serious problems.*

Following a series of meetings with parents, it became obvious that one of the main root causes was that students had to go outside to get some food. So with the help of parents, we decided to strengthen school feeding programmes to ensure that we lower the risk of exposing our students and particularly our girls. Parents agree also to help schools build fences to restrict uncontrolled and risky movements of our students"

Does this mean that the school is now free from any challenge? "Absolutely not, said the Education leader. We still have many challenges that need to be handled. Bugarama Sector is directly linked to two neighboring countries with which we have many things in common. So many of our students' parents have to cross borders when they attend work either in the Democratic Republic of Congo or in Burundi. In some cases, this situation can impede on the parental responsibilities since they may be away much longer than expected or needed, hence failing to provide a proper care to their children who need their parents' attention. In some cases, this situation has favored absenteeism or has increased dropout from some students. We also have some parents that still need to be encouraged to be

proactively involved in the development of their children by investing in the development of their schools.

Lucie advocates also for stronger parents committees for the sake of consistency: "Parents through the schools General Assembly Committees have a great responsibility of monitoring and overseeing the school development. The problem is that some parents have become members of those committees without the required skills. But this problem can be fixed through a continuous support and training from different partners and by learning from their peers".

Looking ahead, the education officer of Bugarama is committed to strengthen the capacities of parents: "We really appreciate REB and VVOB initiative in empowering our parents' committees but also the SEOs and

Head Teachers. Yet, more and more training of parents through their School General Assemblies will continue to be needed to ensure substantial results, she said.

"I encourage parents to own the primary responsibility of educating their children. Sending them to school is a good thing but it is not enough. Being continuously involved in the learning of their children is a must" said Lucie as she calls the parents to strengthen their role in supporting the schools' teachers.

Although she appreciate the good work and the efforts from her sector's Head teachers, Lucie did not fail to encourage them to improve: "Some Head teachers still need to foster their collaboration with parents in matters related to school management and in key decisions. School development cannot be achieved without the real participation of parents".



# A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO FOSTERING THE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Wellspring Foundation's School Development Program is a holistic quality education program covering all of the public and private aided schools in the district of Gasabo, investing in capacity building within 48 rural urban schools of the community. With over five years of experience in this approach to educational change, Wellspring foundation has shown that significant change can be made in the quality of education when investment is made directly into school community stakeholders including parents. Without any change in the material conditions of the school, there can be improved educational outcomes simply by equipping and supporting the educational stakeholders.

One of the key components of Wellspring's School Development initiative is the Community Involvement programme, which essentially aims to encourage the engagement of the community in education and particularly parents.

*Urunana rw'Abarezi Magazine was privileged to hear more about this through Vedaste Byombi who serves as the Head of the Community Involvement Department at Wellspring Foundation, following more than 5 years as an English teacher and later as a school head teacher.*

*"When we speak of the Community Involvement, we do not mean Parents-Teachers Committees only. We think of all the community stakeholders including parents, school educators and leaders, local organisations and associations involved in education, Sectors, cells, and villages"* said the Education Leader as he gave a description of Wellspring's philosophy of the Community involvement.

*"Research and experience has shown that when parents and the community are engaged and active in the education of their children, educational quality can improve and thus greater learning outcomes can be achieved. Wellspring*

*fundamentally believes that the empowering of parent communities is crucial for the educational success of Rwandan schools"* added Vedaste.

According to Vedaste, two main approaches are used by Wellspring to ensure that the community and particularly parents are proactively engaged in supporting the schools efforts to deliver quality education:

*"The first way to get there is to empower Parents School General Assemblies and their committees (SGCs). We deliver intensive training to schools parents committees in a way that they will in turn influence their peer parents since they can easily reach them and interact with them through their general assemblies. Among the tools used are public motivational lecturing, educative dramas (involving students). We also use teaching aids that have been designed and developed by parents themselves with the assistance of our trainers. These are materials designed with local materials like rice sacs"*

*"The additional training conducted by Wellspring facilitates SGACs to teach and encourage their communities towards health and vitality. These have included training units in: Parent – Teacher Relationships, foundation for Good Parenting, family Relationships & Sexual Violence, Worldview and Values, and positive behavior management"*

But Wellspring believes there has to be more than offering trainings to parents: "The training we offer is coupled with another powerful approach called 'Asset-Based Community Development' (ABCD), an approach aimed at empowering parents to discover assets which are among them and to connect different gifts for the benefit of the community. ABCD seeks to help people to see the positive side of what they have. It's a shift from a need-based approach to an asset-based approach. We encourage parents and the community to have a "Half full glass" mentality rather than a "Half empty glass" attitude.

'Asset Based Community Development' seeks to support a community by helping them find their own solutions to the challenges they care about using their own assets. In pioneering this approach in school communities Wellspring is hoping to

witness transformational communities that are moving towards vibrancy.

*"One of the questions we like asking parent in our trainings and interactions is 'What do you have?' instead of 'what do you need?' We do this to help them realize the skills, the ideas, the assets, the potential, the strength, the gifts and the opportunities they have instead of focusing on what they do not have",* told Vedaste.

Vedaste firmly believes that it would be a serious mistake to downplay the importance of parental involvement in education for a sustainable quality education:

*"Parental involvement is the most important thing that can lead to a deep transformation in*

*education. We have seen the impact of parental support in schools' life through various initiatives like supplementing to limited school budget and low teachers income, developing school infrastructure including playgrounds, classrooms, washrooms, kitchens, fences. We have seen how helpful it is to have parents involved in behavior management and discipline of students by collaborating with the school leaders and their peer parents in finding solutions to key issues like dropouts and absenteeism. These things among many others are amazing achievements that are the result of parental engagement and no community or school should afford to ignore them".*



# THE IMPACT OF A GENUINE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

## A story from Theoneste KAYITARE, Kigali Sector Education Officer

Theoneste KAYITARE is a calm and well-spoken education leader who enjoys being an educator. Following his higher education training in psycho-pedagogy from the University of Rwanda/ College of Arts and Social Sciences, Theoneste has spent a couple of years serving in the Education arena, initially as a teacher and later as a Head Teacher prior to becoming the Education Officer of Kigali Sector in January 2012.

Mr. Theoneste expressed his thoughts with URUNANA RW'ABAREZI Magazine on the role of the parents in the learning, the teaching and, in the school management essentials.

*"Genuine and strong education cannot ignore the role and the involvement of parents and the family in particular, he said. " Education starts within the family. Family is known to be the basic unit or cell of society. If its role in education is ignored or omitted, and if children are not well motivated in their families and by their parents in particular,*

*it will not be easy for the teacher to do his job efficiently."*

The Experienced education officer encourages the parents to send their children to school. "It is vital that we continue to raise the parental awareness on the importance of giving to their children consistent access to education", he said.

But sending children to school is not the only contribution expected from parents in the education and the development of their children: *"Parents involvement in education goes beyond just sending children to school. It also includes being involved in the day to day follow up of their learning at school, their growth in knowledge, the values they are being taught by their teachers, and the skills they are acquiring. Parents should seek to be informed of school matters that affect the life and the development of their children at school. And this role should also be fulfilled even at home. The consistency of the involvement of*

*parents in the learning of their children is a strong motivating factor for their children"* said Mr. Theoneste.

There are many areas where parents are called to play a key role in schools management. As the Head of Education in his Sector, Theoneste shares some of the practices in some of the schools he supports: "I commend the increasing active involvement of parents in various aspects of the schools. Parents have considerably contributed in funding school constructions projects and in supporting Teachers housing development. In almost all cases, parents' contribution covered up to 60% of the total budget.

*"Parents have also been involved in the development of ICT infrastructure. They not only initiated the idea but they also provided a consistent leadership that resulted in successful accomplishments".*

In order to ensure a sustainable impact of parental involvement, parents are encouraged

to be involved in School General Assemblies (SGAs) and to continually support the elected School General Assemblies Committees (SGACs): "School General Assemblies are suitable structures that allow Head Teachers and Parents to work hand in hand. In some cases, they proved to be very reliable and efficient channels to communicate important matters to the community", pointed out the Education leader.

*"SGACs proved to be very practical in helping the school to address key Human Resource situations that could not have been addressed by the school leaders alone", said Mr. Theoneste as he explained the relevancy of these structures. "SGACs are very necessary since they serve as*

*connectors between the school leadership and the community. They have been efficient in mobilizing parents with regard to solving problems like school feeding with the few resources at their disposal. SGACs have also strengthened financial accountability in schools".*

Learning is an active and a continual process. This can also be applied to parents as they strive to support the schools. Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) are regarded as opportunities for school leaders to improve their ways of enlisting parental support: "We know that some schools have done a great job in building strong and useful relationships with parents. But these success stories should be told to encourage

*reluctant school leaders to change their attitude and to improve their practices regarding how they collaborate with parents. PLNs are suitable spaces that can encourage such openness in sharing experiences to help the weak learn from the strong" explained Mr. Theoneste.*

But to get there, parents as well as school leaders and teachers will need continual training and support. "Quality Education is a resultant of many components and it cannot be achieved if some actors are not involved. Our mission is to ensure that we give to our children knowledge, skills, discipline and values. Take away parents from the equation and everything will fall apart", said the Education Officer.



# SEOs FEEDBACK ON PERFORMANCE FROM THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING NETWORK SESSIONS VISITS

Since 2014, the Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance (VVOB – Education for development), has worked with REB to establish well-led Professional Learning Networks (PLNs) for Head Teachers within selected sectors, with the aim of contributing to the sharing and building of knowledge among Head Teachers toward promoting best practices and performance.

In the pilot phase, the launching of PLNs took place in one sector of every district. This led 30 Sector Education Officers (SEOs) to receive intensive training on how to lead and coach PLNs for Head Teachers in their sector.

In the ‘upscaling’ phase, 3 additional sectors per district received support in establishing well-led PLNs for Head Teachers in their respective sectors.

Since March 2015, Professional Learning Network sessions in twenty nine Sectors were visited by REB’s School Leadership and Management Unit staff in

collaboration with VVOB.

These sectors included: Kigabiro Rwamagana, Murama Kayonza, Mugesera Ngoma, Ndora Gisagara, Mbazi Huye, Byimana Ruhango, Rugendabari Muhanga, Nyarugunga Kicukiro, Kamegeri Nyamagabe, Busoro Nyanza, Matyazo Ngororero, Kanzenze Rubavu, Gatebe Burera, Kivumu Rutsiro, Gishyita Karongi, Shanghi Nyamasheke, Bugarama Rusizi, Ruramba Nyaruguru, Runda Kamonyi, Gatunda Nyagatare, Kigarama Kirehe, Kabarore Gatsibo, Ntarabana Rulindo, Mataba Gakenke, Kageyo Gicumbi, Gataraga Musanze, Mukamira Nyabihu, Kacyiru Gasabo and Kigali Nyarugenge

The purpose of these visits was to observe the sessions as they took place and provide SEOs (as formal leaders of PLNs at sector level) with feedback on their performance.

Experience shows that practice without getting structural feedback on performance is not effective. In light of that

and following the third training of SEOs from the 30 pilot Sectors where PLNs are now operational, SEOs are being visited (five visits expected for each sector), to ensure that they get feedback on how they lead and coach these PLNs of Head Teachers.

After each PLN sessions, SEOs are given constructive feedback based on the six Key Enablers of effective PLN (you can read about these six Key Enablers of effective PLN in the July 2015 issue of this magazine). The feedback is given to help the PLN grow and become stronger, by allowing all Head Teachers to freely share their experiences and best practices.

The feedback is given **Content-wise** and **Process-wise**:

## **Process**

This is about a series of actions taken or steps made in order to achieve a particular objective in Professional Learning Network sessions. It is also an established or official way of doing things within the network.

**Content**

The content is about what is communicated in Professional Learning Network sessions. It also includes the subject and proportion of substance that is discussed in the network.

**Feedback from field visits**

Following the visits to the twenty nine sectors, we found out what went well but also areas that need improvement and recommendations. These are listed as follows:

**What went well?**

- Conducive and positive atmosphere in the meeting room.
- Live discussions and interactions between all participants in the meeting.
- Very nice and participative PLN sessions
- Clear and precise purpose and focus (as explained by the SEO most of the time at the start of the meeting).
- Clear and precise resolutions from the PLN sessions.
- Responsibilities and accountability shared for all the resolutions from the meeting
- Strong relationship and Collaboration among members
- Deep sense of sociability within the teams (E.g.: initiatives about Ikimina...)
- Collaborative teams.

- Free expression of opinions.
- Duration of the meeting & group work fixed and respected (in some cases)
- HTs participated in setting the items on the agenda
- Critical questions were asked (in some case)
- Nice link between the previous session and the current session (through reviewing previous session's resolutions)
- Only one or few items is/are discussed; allowing deeper and thorough discussions
- Nice sitting design (round table) giving every one equal opportunity to participate
- Innovative activities (E.g.: Umunsi wa gatanu w'urukwi meaning a Friday for a piece of wood for Schools with the School Feeding Program)

**Areas of improvement & Recommendations**

- Ask deeper, critical and clear questions to allow real interaction and learning.
- Involve Head Teachers in defining the items on the agenda (who decides which item should be tackled?)
- Fix the duration of the meeting and/or group work activities and respect it (in

case an extra time is needed, discuss this with Head Teachers first)

- Distribution of speech among the members of the group (not necessarily SEO-HT-SEO-HT...). In some cases the SEOs took around 70% of the time and all the HTs 30%!
- Tackling too many items in the meeting (no focus, no deep discussions)
- HTs not participating in setting the agenda of the meeting (HTs should be involved in setting items on the agenda)
- Keep records of the meeting (minutes)
- Lack of link between today's PLN session and the previous one
- Always contextualise group members' experiences to the school's current situation
- Try not to jumping on the solutions without critical & deep analysis of the problems at hand
- Need for more spontaneous discussions without more formal and rigid ways of exchanging speeches (be spontaneous and flexible)
- Insuring there are clear resolutions from the PLN meeting
- Allowing some extra time to individual HTs for key exercises that require deep thinking

- Think about (in relevant cases) using group work as a method for deeper analysis of problems to be discussed
- A sitting design in the meeting room allowing every participant equal participation

During these visits, it was clear that, as members of the group engage together and discuss challenges of practice, their level of understanding of the problems to be solved and they can find common grounds.

These PLNs for Head Teachers are contributing to sharing experience and building knowledge that will help improve Head Teachers' attitudes, practices, and performance. In the long-run, there is no doubt that this will highly and positively impact students' learning outcomes.

## THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY TOWARD SUCCESSFUL QUALITY EDUCATION

### **A story from Japhet NDAGIJIMANA, Head teacher of Mihabura Primary School**

Japhet Ndagijimana serves as Head teacher of Mihabura Primary School, a private but government subsidized school located in the sector of Bugarama of Rusizi district. It was with a great enthusiasm that Japhet shared with Urunana rw'Abarezi Magazine his perspective on parental involvement in education.

Japhet commended the role of parents in fostering the collaboration with the school: "The Government plays an important role in the development of our school since we are partly aided by the Government. However, I can say that parents are the ones who play a tremendous role.

We have a vibrant School General Assembly. This one elects a Committee to represent the Assembly in matters pertaining to school development. We also have an active finance management committee that ensures financial accountability. We regularly organize meetings with all the members of these committees respectively to ensure that parents are accurately and consistently updated on school issues and progress. We have witnessed an increased interest from parents in being involved in schools matters like learning, teachers' development and students' performance" said Japhet.

*"The first person who can help us to be successful in our school business is the parent. They play a crucial role in supporting us to achieve quality education. Children are with school teachers in daytimes but in the evening, they are with their parents. So it is important to consider them in the equation"* observed the school leader.

Japhet told Urunana rw'Abarezi Magazine some key areas where parents have played a remarkable role to support the school: *"In previous years, we have had recurrent exams failures on behalf of our students. Only 3 out of 40*

*students would succeed national exams! In exploring various causes for this problem, we requested parents input through various meetings and discussions and it became obvious that one of the root causes was a limited involvement of parents in the learning of their children. In collaboration with parents, we reflected on ways to ensure that all children are educated accordingly within our means. We developed a practical and inclusive system to help all our students to be empowered and to facilitate their learning. As a result of this investment, our school was transformed to the point other schools organize study visits to our school to learn from our achievement..."*

The school leader, however, wants to move from good to great

since the school still has challenges to overcome: "Not all parents are 100 per cent involved. Some do not attend meeting regularly and yet those are places where they should access important and relevant information. Some parents do not follow up on the learning of their children both at school and at home. Some parents do not seriously push their children or do not understand the importance of their support to help improve quality education" deplored Japhet.

Japhet sends a compelling message to the community: "Whether you are a parent or a local leader, we should all be aware that it is our duty to ensure we foster a vibrant learning environment for our children. Each person living in our community should feel responsible for the development of our

students because at the end, we are all impacted by the consequences created by a poor learning environment and nobody will be spared! So parents should be the first in ensuring that every child attends school since every child matters. Parents should not leave the decisions related to quality education to teachers and head teachers alone.

And to those who think that the parental involvement is limited to send their children to school, Japhet is very clear: "You cannot have a fruitful student learning if some stakeholders are not deeply involved as they should. This is particularly true when it comes to parental involvement since those children that we teach and educate have homes and families that they are coming from. And we cannot afford to ignore this"

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*The first person who can help us to be successful in our school business is the parent.*

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