

PRIMARY SCHOOL MAINTENANCE PROPOSED POLICY

THAT THE HEADMASTER AND SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF EACH INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL BE GIVEN FULL RESPONSIBILITY OVER SCHOOL MAINTENANCE

Legal background on the proposed primary school maintenance policy and elaboration on the sections within the proposal

The core reason behind maintenance of any school lies in the belief that schools (primary in this instance) are a crucial part of human development. Primary schools are breeding grounds for future leaders. It is therefore crucial that schools and their surroundings are properly maintained to enable the children of this nation to develop to their full potential. The Republic of Vanuatu CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (RATIFICATION) ACT NO. 26 OF 1992, adopted from the United Nations' CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD 1989, Article 29 1 (a) reads: „,„the education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”.

In the LAWS OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU, REVISED EDITION 1988, there was little consideration of school maintenance, especially at the primary level. Section 27(2), although refers to school councils will also be applicable to school committees and it reads, “ A school council shall maintain in good order all land and buildings used for the purpose of its council school”. There is no definition of what maintenance involves nor any specification as to how the council is to carry out this duty. Findings in the research into primary schools maintenance also indicates that headmasters can play a very crucial role (as indicated by schools such as Lolopuepue and South West Bay). While head teachers are required, under sections 21 (a) and 31(1) to act as secretary to school councils and committees, there is no specific legal provision for their involvement in maintenance.

In all of the 25 schools considered, the level of success or failure in maintenance depended largely on these two groups. The success in school maintenance of schools such as Lolopuepue and South West Bay is largely attributed to the expertise of the head teacher and the good relationships that are forged not only with school committees but also directly with community members. head teachers provide the formal link between the Education Department and the communities. School committee members represent community sentiments and assist in making most decisions and drawing up work programs. School committees provide the necessary link between the head teachers and the community members. The success of school programs depends largely on the commitment of the school committee and the willingness that they (school committee members) are able to cultivate among community members.

The aim of this policy therefore is to empower the school councils/committees and head teachers to carry out maintenance of the respective primary schools. What is proposed is mainly an elaboration of existing laws although some suggestions may differ from existing practice. There is however, in addition, considerations of other areas that need to be taken into account, as they are part and parcel of this maintenance issue. This policy falls in line with Government legislation on Decentralisation (Decentralisation Act No. 1 of 1994) which aims to lessen the burden on Central Government administration and allow provincial and local bodies to be more Independent in choosing how to run their affairs.

Maintenance of primary schools will involve overall responsibility over everything within the school boundary. This will include protection of school buildings and their contents and proper maintenance of the school ground.

General Framework for Primary Schools Maintenance Policy

Community Assistance

- provision of free community labour
- provision of local maintenance personnel
- other contributions when required

head teacher and school committee responsibilities over major decisions including usage of finances

- eg - Budget allocation
- Fundraising activities
 - Administration of local fees
 - Decisions over teachers' rents

Government Control

- Provide auditing system primary school accounts

Provincial Education Officers' responsibilities

- Occasional communication with head teacher and school committee members
- Receive Financial and narrative reports from school committees
- Organise training of Head teachers and school committees
- In charge of authorising technical assistance to schools when necessary
- Advises the Department of Education and Ministry of proceedings in particular schools
- Oversees proceedings within the whole province

Government Assistance

- Make provision of extra responsibility allowance to head teachers and budget allowance for school committees to work
- Provide technical advisers to visit schools; make reports on buildings and provide materials accordingly
- Provide extra training to head teachers (when required)

ADMINISTRATION FRAMEWORK

1) Give Headmasters Responsibility allowance

A responsibility allowance will accommodate the extra duties that are required in maintenance. These additional duties will be added to the existing head teacher's Terms of Reference. Head teachers of schools such as Lolopuepue (on Ambae) and South West Bay (on Malekula) have shown that their position is crucial in forging the links and trusts required for the operations of the school. Availability of responsibility allowance will act as an impetus for better performance.

Head teachers are to be members of primary school committees. LAWS OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU, REVISED EDITION, 1988, CHAPTER 121 SECTION 30 (2) reads: "The members of a Committee shall consists of the head teacher on Head teachers, ex-officio members, and not less than two other members who shall be elected by the parents and teachers of the school or schools at meetings convened for that purpose by the secretary of the Committee..."

As involvement of head teachers in maintenance will become a formal requirement and which will involve extra duties, and amount of 24,000 vatu paid over a period of 12 months of 2,000 vatu installments per month has been recommended based on findings of head teachers and community workshops carried out throughout Vanuatu since 1995. As a means of comparison, during the colonial era when the education system was still under the British and French administrative systems, only the French primary school head teachers were given any allowance for this responsibility. This was based on 1,000 francs for every class each month. There will be no distinction in allowances allocated to head teachers of "boarding" and "day" schools. Based on the Ministry of Education 1995 Statistical Information released last year (1995), there are 278 Government primary schools and 85 private schools which are supported by the Central Government, making a combined total 365 Government-supported schools. An amount therefore of 8,712,000 vatu will come out of the Central Education Budget to compensate for the proposed head teachers' allowance annually. This amount will be provided for by the Central Government as part of the head teachers' salary package. This is provided for by the REPUBLIC OF VANUATU TEACHING SERVICE STAFF RULES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 51 (1) OF THE TEACHING SERVICE ACT No. 15 OF 1983, CHAPTER 3, SECTION 11, which reads: "The Minister responsible for Education may from time to time create responsibility allowances to be paid to the holders of specific posts where it is considered that the carrying out of extra duties, merits the grant of such an allowance, and where this is not compensate by the officer's substantive salary or an acting allowance". With respect to schools maintenance, some of the head teacher's roles will therefore be:

- i) Assist in Developing the school constitution or rules to safe guard the school.

- ii) Assist school committees and communities to understand their roles in school maintenance
- iii) Assist in preparation of annual budget
- iv) Assist in income-generating activities
- v) Assist in documenting school finances
- vi) Responsibility over storage of maintenance material and equipment.
- vii) Assist in identifying and organising local resource people (when required)
- viii) Occasional communication with provincial Education Officers
- ix) Act as the formal link between the Government and school committee.

2) Allocate to the school committee a budget and specify its responsibilities

All of the primary schools considered have school committees but many of them are neither active nor responsive. A budget allocation will encourage more active participation and thus commitment to the members' areas of responsibilities. Financial allocation by the Central Government calculated at 1,000 vatu per student annually to school committees will remain. This is not financial compensation to committee members (as prohibited in the LAWS OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU, REVISED EDITION, 1998, CHAPTER 121 SECTION 33 (1)). This will rather be used by the school committee to pay for school maintenance or to generate extra funds specifically for schools maintenance. School committees are expected to raise extra funds in addition to the Government allocation. Budget provisions and specifications of school committee responsibilities is recognition of the school committee members' roles, especially in carrying out the duties related to primary schools maintenance. Finances of the school committee will be in the hands of both the Chairperson and head teacher (who will be secretary of the Committee) of the school. Any withdrawals from Bank have to be signed by the chairperson and the secretary. The accounts of the committee are to be audited annually, or any other time the Department may warrant that necessary. Annual narrative and financial maintenance reports are to be submitted to Education Department. Purchasing of school maintenance materials and hiring of labourers will be the responsibility of the school committee (with the advice of provincial education officers or the Central Education Department if necessary).

Some of the roles of school committee members, with respect to maintenance will therefore include:

- (i) Assist in developing the school constitution
- (ii) Organise community involvement in school maintenance
- (iii) Co-ordination of maintenance work during school holidays
- (iv) Approval of school budgets
- (v) Assist in preparation of school reports
- (vi) Assist head teachers in maintaining school discipline
- (vii) Organise, with the help of communities, voluntary labour
- (viii) Occasional contact with Provincial Education Officer.

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3) Clarification of other sources of income

As indicated in section 2, the current practice is allocation by the Central Education Department to respective schools of 1,000 vatu per student. This will be maintained. In addition, rents deducted from teachers living school houses will be paid to the primary school account through the Education Department.

Additional sources of income will be encouraged. LAWS OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU, REVISED EDITION, 1988, CHAPTER 121, SECTION 1 (c) AND (d), while addressing functions of school councils will also apply to primary school committees and it reads: "...subject to prior approval of the Minister, fix and collect school fees" and "subject to the prior approval of the Minister, receive and expand for the benefit to the school grants other than those made by the Government".

The following is an example of how primary schools can generate their own funds. We take as an example, Vinamangwe primary school (on West Ambae),

- (i) Allocation by the Government
1,000 vatu for each student - $105 \times 8.00 / \text{Pupil/annum}$
There are 81 students
(81 times 1,000 vatu = 81,000 vatu per annum. $= \text{Rp } 9,600,000 / \text{school/annum}$)
- (ii) 2 teachers' rent houses
(2 times 50,000 vatu) = 100,000 vatu per annum
Rents that used to be paid to the Government should be paid directly to the school concerned.
- (iii) Last Year's fund-raising
200,000 vatu
- (iv) School fees
500 vatu per term
(81 times 1,500 vatu) = 121,500 vatu per annum.

Vinamangwe school in 1995 would therefore have ended up with 502,000 vatu had all these avenues been explored. Where there are financial-generation activities, clarification will be made as to the purpose of such activities. A separate bank account will be kept for the purpose of maintenance.

4) Provision of training to head teachers and School Committee Members

To execute their duties well, school committee members and head teachers will be trained in the areas that they are required to perform. It will be the responsibility of the Regional Education Officers, in liaison with the Central Education Department to organise and run training of committee members. This will include training in the following areas:

- (i) Simple accounting methods
- (ii) Controlling Bank accounts
- (iii) Managing internal conflicts
- (iv) Simple planning procedures
- (v) How to obtain maintenance funds (if required)
- (vi) School committee as legal entity
- (vii) Basic maintenance skills
- (viii) Skills in obtaining technical assistance
- (ix) And any other areas of relevance.

5) Provision of technical support

It will be the responsibility of the Provincial Education Officers to organise technical support for primary schools maintenance (when requested by respective school committees). Provincial education officers will ensure that experts from the locality are called upon to undertake any maintenance work. There will still be one building supervisor in each province who will be paid by the Central Government. The building supervisor will be under the responsibility of the Provincial Education Officer and will offer assistance on request from the school committees pending the PEO's satisfaction that this assistance is necessary.

The current practice of having a supervisor leading a team to carry out maintenance in individual schools is quite expensive to run. If we consider the salaries, housing, use of vehicles, travelling expenses, overnight allowances, and costs of tools used, it makes more sense to use expertise from the locality rather than rely on the provincial building Adviser's team.

The aim of using local experts is to prepare surrounding communities to be able to take responsibility over their schools in future. Where local experts are called in to undertake maintenance work, a leader will be chosen among them (local experts) to ensure that the work is carried out in the best possible manner. The head teacher will provide overall supervision over any maintenance work being carried out. However, if this is not possible, this role (overall supervision) will be delegated to any one of the school committee members.

(6) Central Government Auditing

A simple audit section responsible for primary schools may be set up either within the education department or finance department. The proposed database will provide some control through the Government accounting system; especially if this is linked to the existing finance set up.

Auditing of the primary schools' accounts will be an annual event unless the Provincial Education Officer thinks that the accounts of a particular school warrants immediate auditing. Provincial Education Officers will have copies of both narrative and financial annual reports of primary schools in their respective regions. Central Government auditing will increase faith in the National Government. At the same time, auditing will increase confidence of parents to assist in school activities, especially those involving financial generation.

Auditing of the primary school accounts will entail:

- (i) Checking the receipts of spending to ensure the money is spent on the areas that it is associated for
- (ii) Checking receipts or any other documents detailing any income generated within the school and ensuring that the amount stated matches those receipts;
- (iii) Advising the provincial education officers and the Central Education Department of any suspected mismanagement of school funds.

Regional Education Officers will be directly responsible to deal with the outcome of the audit reports. This may include taking disciplinary measures against particular individuals.

(7) Disciplinary Measures

Every primary school will have school rules with specifications on disciplinary measures against any person who willfully causes damage to any property of the school. Every primary school student will pay 1,000 vatu per annum as a cautionary measure against possible damage to school property. This amount will be refunded in full at the end of the school year if the particular student is not responsible for any damage to school property. However, if damage is worth more than 1,000 vatu, the student is solely responsible to cover the full cost of the damage.

The school committee will deal with outsiders who willfully cause damage to school property. If a settlement is not reached, however, between the immediate parties, the school committee may choose to take legal action against the offender(s). In all cases, the Provincial Education Officer must be informed of all decisions taken.

(8) Annual Reports of the School Committee

LAWS OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU, REVISED EDITION, 1988, SECTION 32, while address school boards and councils, will apply in the case of school committees, and it reads, "Each Board and school council shall make an annual report of its activities to the Minister not less than 45 days after the close of the financial year".

The school committee will, through the Provincial Education Officer, submit to the Minister of Education a narrative report on all activities carried out during the year. This will be submitted with the financial report and will be done at the end of each year.

(9) Possible roles of provincial education officers with respect to primary school maintenance.

The success of this policy depends primarily on the interaction between many players, a few of which are provincial education officers. While it is not the intention to document the roles of provincial education officers in this proposed policy, here are a few areas of responsibility that will be required of the provincial education officers with respect to primary school maintenance:

- (i) Occasionally, communicate with head teachers and school committee members'
- (ii) Receive financial and narrative reports from school committees
- (iii) Organise training for head teachers and school committee members
- (iv) In charge of authorising technical assistance to schools when necessary;
- (v) Advise the Department of Education and Ministry of Education of proceedings in particular schools
- (vi) Oversee proceedings within the whole province.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

DISTINGUISH BETWEEN FINANCIAL ALLOCATION FOR BUILDING MAINTENANCE AND CAPITAL WORKS.

Special consideration must be given to the distinction between finances allocated for building maintenance and that targeted for capital works (or constructing new buildings). At the moment, large sums of money allocated for primary school maintenance are being spent on constructing new buildings. A capital works policy is therefore necessary; not only to ensure proper usage of allocated funds, but also to provide a base from which funds can be requested specifically for the construction of new school buildings.

Set rules will be required in this policy to ensure proper operation. This will include setting up tender regulations, rules on using a standard building model (which must be cyclone proof), and provisions for community participation (perhaps on a 50/50 basis) in funding specific school buildings. There will also be an annual Government allocation for constructions of new school buildings. A capital works committee is therefore necessary to draw up a criteria for the consideration of requests from potential beneficiaries. A distinction between capital works and school maintenance is therefore crucial to ensure proper usage of funds.