

**Negotiating Roles and Responsibilities in
the Context of Decentralised School
Governance: A Case Study of One Cluster
of Schools in Zimbabwe**

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DECLARATION

The work presented in this thesis is my own.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal has certified ethical clearance for this study.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vitallis Chikoko', written over a horizontal line.

Vitallis Chikoko

ABSTRACT

On attaining independence in 1980, Zimbabwe invested heavily in its education system in order to redress the colonial inequalities and to 'grow its own timber' in terms of the knowledge and skills desperately needed by the new nation. However, 10 years later, the heavy government expenditure on education was no longer sustainable or defensible. The rapid expansion of the education system gave rise to grave concern for economic efficiency. Critics noted the tumbling pass rates and evident decline in the quality of education, with the concomitant high unemployment rates for the school graduates. Furthermore, the highly centralised, top-down system of education governance made it difficult, if not impossible for stakeholders at the various levels of the system to participate effectively in decision-making. In response to these and other pressures, Zimbabwe adopted a decentralised system of school governance.

While decentralisation of school governance and school clustering have become internationally acclaimed reforms targeted at improving the quality of educational provision, and are consistent with the notion of good governance, there remain outstanding questions regarding, among other things, how those tasked to implement such reforms understand, experience and respond to them, and the impact this has on the success or failure of these innovations. This inquiry investigates teachers', school heads' and parents' understandings and experiences of, and responses to decentralised school governance in one

cluster of five primary schools in the Gutu District of Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe.

Through a multi-site case study research design, involving each of the five schools in the cluster as a site, this study utilised triangulation of a questionnaire, interviews, observations and document analyses to investigate three issues: stakeholders' understanding and experiences of, and responses to decentralised school governance; their views regarding their capacity to function effectively in a decentralised school governance system; and their experiences and views of the factors that hinder and/or enable decentralised school governance in the cluster.

Informed by three theoretical frameworks, namely the locus of decentralised decision-making power, policy implementation, and educational change, the findings show that decentralised school governance has developed a sense of ownership of schools on the part of stakeholders. However, a number of factors hamper the decentralisation process. These include the rigid national educational regulatory framework, the uneven distribution of power within schools, and the school and community contexts that are not conducive to decentralisation. Findings also suggest that stakeholders feel incapable of functioning effectively in a decentralised school governance system. These findings imply that there is need for capacity building on the part of all stakeholders, as well as research into how clusters can be made more effective.

DEDICATION

To my late parents, Mai Justina Chipeneti and Baba Vengai Josphat Chikoko, who, despite their meagre resources, and against a plethora of other odds, sacrificed to send me to school, and from whom I shall continue to draw inspiration.

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CHAPTER ONE

Setting the Scene

Around the world the emergence of modern economies, increasingly educated societies, the triumph of capitalism, the collapse of centralised planning, the demise of colonialism, and the demands for increased democratisation have resulted in enormous pressures on nations to decentralise their public institutions, especially in education.¹

1.1 Introduction and background to the study

Decentralisation and school clustering have become internationally acclaimed educational reforms (Bray, 1987; McGinn & Welsh, 1999) that are consistent with the notion of good governance (Grant Lewis & Motala, 2004). However, there remain questions about how those tasked to implement such reforms understand, experience and respond to them, and about the impact this has on the success or failure of these innovations. This study examines stakeholders' understandings and experiences of, and responses to, decentralised school governance in one cluster of five primary schools in the Gutu District of Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe.

1.1.1 Unequal Provision in the Pre-independence Education System

Like in any post-colonial state, the trends in Zimbabwean school governance at the beginning of the 21st century can be traced back to its colonial period. To illustrate, because of apartheid-style policies, at independence in 1980,

¹ (Hanson in AbiSamra, 2001, p. 1)

most Zimbabwean blacks had suffered a plethora of deprivations, among which was lack of access to quality education. For example, from 1953 to 1963, in the then Federation of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and Nyasaland (now Malawi), education for the Europeans was a federal responsibility, while African education was a mere territorial responsibility (Mumbengegwi, 1995). This entailed far more resources and attention on the former group than on the latter.

This trend continued after the break-up of the Federation, when former Southern Rhodesia became Rhodesia, and European education fell under the direct governance of central government while the Department of Native Affairs ran African education, again in pursuance of racial discrimination and attendant inequitable distribution of resources. This department was not concerned with the adequacy of educational provision, but with controlling the access of, and channelling the black child into areas in which he/she would not compete with the white child (Rukanda & Mukurazhizha, 1997). At district level, a 'Native' Commissioner ran the Department of Native Affairs who, through the district council, governed the black rural public schools. From the point of view of the colonial government, this set up was arguably a decentralised form of school governance for the blacks since 'local authorities' ran the education enterprise. In reality, the practice oppressed the black learner and was consistent with the entrenched colonial philosophy of an inequitable distribution of resources on racial grounds.

As blacks exerted more pressure in demand for education, the colonial government tightened its racial oppression through legislation. To illustrate, on 20 April 1966, a plan called '*The 1966 New Plan for African Education*' was enforced (Government of Rhodesia, 1966; Mumbengegwi, 1995). The major feature of the *New Plan* was that transition from primary school (Grades 1- 7) to secondary school (Forms 1-6) would be rigidly controlled. Only 12.5 percent of Grade 7 graduates would be allowed into Form 1. 37.5 percent of them would be allowed into Grade 8, an inferior secondary school system that was eventually expanded up to Grade 11.

The Grade 8-11 secondary system was inferior in a number of ways. First, it was designed for those who, by virtue of their poor performance in the Grade 7 examination, did not qualify to enter Form 1. Second, the curriculum was a watered down one, from which graduates could only attain low-level skills in carpentry, agriculture, home economics and related areas. Third, graduates of that system could not qualify to proceed to university. The rest of the primary school graduates (50 percent) were relegated to languish in society and look for menial jobs or fend for their own education through correspondence (Mumbengegwi, 1995).

Even as late as 1979, out of a total of 819 586 black primary school going age children, 403 250 (49 percent) were out of school (Mumbengegwi, 1995).

The 1979 *Education Act* introduced yet other restrictions on the black child (Mumbengegwi, 1995). Through a zoning system, a child could only enrol at a school in an area where the parent was a legal resident. This move was

apparently designed to prevent the majority black pupils from entering the affluent, previously 'whites only' schools. As such, among the most significant reasons for the country's war of liberation was the need to provide education as a right for every Zimbabwean, as opposed to it being a privilege for a minority (Zvobgo, 1986).

1.1.2 Re-visioning education in the post-independence era

Against the background just described, upon attaining independence in 1980, the new state of Zimbabwe straight away began a rapid expansion of its education system. For example, in 1979, there were 2401 primary schools in the country, but slightly over a decade later in 1991, they had almost doubled to 4549. In 1980, the total primary school enrolment was 1 235 994, and in 1991 it had risen by 86 percent to 2 294 934 (Mumbengegwi, 1995).

Secondary school enrolment expansion was even greater than in primary schools, with a tenfold increase from 66 215 to 708 080 over the same period (Dorsey, Matshazi, & Nyagura, 1991). This vast expansion in the education system in the country had the express purpose of eliminating inequalities that prevailed prior to 1980, during the colonial era.

In terms of educational governance, the system became highly centralised (Reynolds, 1990). This model of educational governance was apparently informed by the thinking that since the focus was on redressing previous imbalances nation wide, central government was perceived as best placed and resourced to drive this arduous process. During the first decade of independence, this model seemed the best way forward. All stakeholders

down the bureaucratic education system seemed to respond positively by implementing policies relayed to them through the top-down policy-making model. Government on its part would foot the huge education bill for salaries and allowances, transport, services, pupil grants, furniture and equipment, student loans, examination expenses, among others (Reynolds, 1990). However, this bold and spirited trend in Zimbabwe's education system was soon to face teething problems, as is reported in section 1.3 below.

1.2 Towards cost-cutting, democratisation and improved quality in education

Towards the end of the first decade of independence, the heavy government expenditure on education was no longer sustainable, neither was it defensible any more. Firstly, as Reynolds (1990) rightly contends, the rapid expansion of the Zimbabwean education system since 1980 gave rise to grave concern over economic efficiency. There was high unemployment among the products of the education system. Other social service sectors requiring as much government funding as education itself such as health, transport and communication began to show signs and symptoms of under-funding.

Secondly, critics noted the tumbling pass rates and evident decline in the quality of education, with the concomitant high unemployment rates for the school graduates (Dorsey, Matshazi, & Nyagura, 1991). These and other critics argued that the status quo regarding the running of the education system could not be allowed to continue.

Thirdly, the highly centralised, top-down system of governance made it difficult, if not impossible for stakeholders at various levels of the education system to participate in decision-making thereby alienating them from the entire approach, and pointing to the need for a change in organisational culture (Rukanda & Mukurazhizha, 1997). In the light of the resource limitations and the unemployability of the education system's graduates referred to above, government could not afford to alienate further the various stakeholders (e.g. parents) any more.

These and other realities forced a huge paradigm shift in government, from greater focus on quantitative to qualitative education, from a system almost wholly government funded to one of cost sharing and cost cutting, and from an authoritarian to a democratised system of education. This would create a 'community portrait' (Johnson & Goode, 1996) of collaboration between government, schools themselves, parents, communities and other stakeholders. In effect, this necessitated the democratisation of the education system in general, and of schools, in particular. The belief was that resources would be better used and the task of creating good quality and more equal education better addressed if means and methods were chosen at the local level by local stakeholders, rather than the central state (Lundahl, 2002).

1.3 Decentralisation and school clustering

In response to imperatives such as the need to democratise the governance of education and improve the quality of schooling, Zimbabwe adopted a decentralised system of school governance consistent with the notion of good

governance (Grant Lewis & Motala, 2004). This meant that the powers previously vested in the higher tiers of the education system were now to flow down to the lower levels such as regions, districts, school clusters and individual schools. This shift emphatically manifested itself through *Statutory Instrument 87* of 1992, by which legal tool government created School Development Committees (SDCs) to govern the affairs of non-government schools. A similar body: the School Development Association (SDA) was created for government schools. Later in this section, the classification of schools in Zimbabwe is described. Because this study was conducted among SDC-governed schools, the discussion throughout this thesis centres on these.

Zimbabwe's adoption of decentralised school governance was not merely a response to national imperatives as described above. It was also informed by a significant 'macro' variable: globalisation. In education, globalisation manifests itself through national and local implementation of what are essentially international trends. 'The shift to decentralisation of education, sometimes involving greater autonomy for schools, is widespread' (Bush & Middlewood, 2005, p. 6). The notion of global decentralisation of education is informed by the argument that highly centralised systems tend to be bureaucratic and to allow very little discretion to schools and local communities. Leaders operating in such tightly controlled systems experience difficulties in developing a distinctive vision for their schools, they lack the scope to articulate school goals and cannot lead and manage staff effectively

because decisions to this effect are centralised elsewhere (Bush & Middlewood, 2005; Lauglo, 1997).

A School Development Committee is composed of five parents elected by fellow parents of pupils enrolled at the school; the head of the school; the deputy head of the school; a teacher at the school and where the responsible authority of the school is a local authority, a councillor appointed by the local authority; and for any other relevant authority or body, a person is appointed by that authority or body (Government of Zimbabwe, 1992, p. 613). The functions of the School Development Committee (SDC) include providing and assisting in the operation and development of the school, advancing the moral, cultural, physical, and intellectual welfare of pupils at the school, and promoting the welfare of the school for the benefit of its existing and future pupils and teachers. Thus, while there is no national education policy directly guiding decentralisation in Zimbabwe, the SDC structure, described above, clearly implies and expresses such an intention of central government.

The SDC seems to be a sound and well-positioned grassroots structure geared towards the decentralisation of school governance. However, the ways in which such decentralisation is understood, experienced and responded to by the stakeholders in schools, and the latter's views regarding their capacity to cope with decentralised school governance are not yet adequately known. As well, the factors hindering and/or enabling the process in Zimbabwe need to be explored. This study was motivated by the need to

examine these issues and to seek an explanation for school governance in the cluster under study.

Recognising the importance of developing the capacity of education professionals for this new institutional context, government launched a capacity building strategy, the Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ) in 1993 (The Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe, 1995). The objectives of the Programme include developing teachers' and school heads' competences in school management and professional development; improving the quality of teaching and learning experiences in schools through continuous formal and non-formal in-service training of teachers; upgrading and updating management and supervisory skills of heads of schools and education officers and extending the role of SDCs/SDAs from that of just providing physical infrastructure to full partners in the school system (The Better Schools Programme (Zimbabwe), 2000).

The BSPZ's major tool designed to achieve its goals was the cluster (The Better Schools Programme (Zimbabwe), 2000). This is a group of about five schools in the same vicinity, comprising primary and/or secondary schools, which have agreed to share human, material and financial resources in order to improve the quality and relevance of education in their institutions. The cluster concept has grown largely from developments in educational micro planning (Bray, 1987). According to Bray (1987), proponents of micro planning argue that even in the smallest of countries, it is impossible for the central Ministry of Education to know the specific conditions in every school

and its locality. It follows that while it remains essential to have a national framework within which all schools operate, it is equally essential to treat each locality as an entity in itself. Thus micro planning implies a degree of decentralisation in decision-making. Such decentralised planning is envisaged to bring about a greater achievement of educational goals through stronger local participation in decision-making than would be the case with the centre controlling what happens locally.

In the context of Zimbabwe, the major role of the cluster, as can be discerned from the objectives of the BSPZ, is to run staff development programmes for its stakeholders. A cluster is run by a cluster co-ordinating committee comprising two school heads, a resource teacher, one teacher per school, one head of department per school, one Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) supervisor, the area councillor, one SDC representative (or, in the case of government schools, one SDA representative) and two co-opted influential members of the community (The Better Schools Programme (Zimbabwe), 2000). The composition of the cluster co-ordinating committee appears to provide a structure adequately representative of all the major stakeholders concerned with school governance. This implies that it is ideally suited as an instrument for school capacity building purposes. The cluster also appears to be an attractive decentralisation tool because it operates at the grassroots of the education system and has a widely representative composition.

The impact of the BSPZ, in terms of its success in building capacity among the various stakeholders, is largely unknown and requires investigation. Therefore this study investigated, among other things, stakeholders' views about their capacity to function effectively in a decentralised school governance system. Also, centres of power, such as a government ministry, may delegate or de-concentrate authority to the periphery, such as a cluster of schools, without necessarily relinquishing real decision-making powers at the centre (Bullock & Thomas, 1997; Cheng, 2002; Education International, 1996; Weiler, 1990). Thus, this study sought to examine stakeholders' understandings and experiences of, and responses to, decentralisation.

1.4 Purpose and rationale for the study

As explained above, in response to imperatives such as the need to democratise the governance of education and improve the quality of schooling, Zimbabwe has adopted a system of decentralised school governance and school clustering. While decentralised governance and school clustering are internationally acclaimed reforms (Bray, 1987; Education Quality Review, 2004; McGinn & Welsh, 1999) and cohere with the notion of good governance (Grant Lewis & Motala, 2004), it is doubtful that decentralisation is the panacea to all the ills of centralised governance (Lyons, 1985). The fact that there may be political, administrative, technical, and other obstacles in centralised educational planning and implementation is not a sufficient argument for decentralisation. Arguably, the same failings that exist in centralised education planning may manifest, even more so, in decentralised systems. Education Quality Review (2004) contends that

despite the rapid growth of school-and-cluster-based teacher in-service programmes in developing countries, there are outstanding questions about their organisation, content, effectiveness, cost, and sustainability. For example, the question about sustainability is pertinent given that, as asserted by the Education Quality Review, most school-based and cluster programmes are originally supported by outside donors.

In addition, the legacy of colonial rule and nation-building imperatives in post-colonial states tend to lay strong, but uncritical, emphasis on centralised control (Lauglo, 1996). Also, shortage of material resources as well as issues relating to the lack of capacity on the part of stakeholders to function effectively in decentralised systems appear to strongly challenge the possibilities for successful decentralised school governance. To illustrate, in a study on capacity building for decentralised service delivery in Ethiopia, Watson (2005) reports that low stakeholder capacity (for example, among teachers and parents) to implement decentralised decisions poses one of the greatest challenges to decentralisation. Commenting on decentralisation efforts in the United States of America, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) (2002) contends that decentralisation brings with it the possibility of extreme inequalities – the possibility that local communities (including parents and educators) may not have the knowledge and resources to adequately protect the quality of education provided to children. Thus, just as centralisation has failed as a full guarantee for the rights of all, so decentralisation may prove inadequate to the same task. This study was motivated by the realisation that the ways in which the above factors influence

school governance in Zimbabwe is still unknown. However, such knowledge is essential for reviewing the noble decentralisation efforts undertaken by the country so far. Such reviews are necessary if the quality of educational provision is to be improved (Allington, 2000).

This study was premised on the notion that decentralised school governance can only succeed if stakeholders adequately understand it, feel capable to function effectively therein, and the hindering and/or enabling factors are addressed and enhanced respectively. The study emerged against the backdrop of an absence of such knowledge. Thus, it sought to investigate stakeholders' understandings, experiences and responses to this reform.

In pursuit of the issues raised above, the study revolved around the following questions:

1. How do the stakeholders in the cluster understand, experience and respond to decentralised school governance?
2. What are the stakeholders' views regarding their capacity to function effectively in a decentralised school governance system?
3. What are their experiences and views of the factors that hinder and/or enable decentralised school governance in the cluster?

1.5 Research setting

To facilitate a sound understanding of the study, this section highlights the research setting. Chapter Four provides a detailed account of the setting. The

study was conducted in a cluster of five neighbouring primary schools in a rural setting of Zimbabwe. The cluster includes two church-owned and three Rural District Council-owned schools. This context and setting was appropriate for the study in that for the developing world in general, and Zimbabwe in particular, it is in such sites that challenges associated with the implementation of innovations tend to manifest strongly (Gymraig, 2001). It is also in such sites that, because of their remoteness, stakeholders' experiences of, and responses to change, are often under-researched (Fullan, 2003). This is typically the case in the Zimbabwean education system (Mavesera, Madungwe, Seremwe, & Moyana, 2000).

According to Section 9.1 of the *Education Act* (Government of Zimbabwe, 1996a), schools in Zimbabwe are classified as either government or non-government. Government schools are owned and run by central government. Authorities, such as town/city councils and rural district councils (RDCs), churches, farmers and trusts own and run non-government schools. Such organisations are referred to as Responsible Authorities. This study was conducted in (non-government) RDC- and church-run schools. RDCs are the local 'arm' of the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works. Through RDCs, it is this Ministry, and not the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, that owns the greatest number of schools in the country (Rukanda & Mukurazhizha, 1997). This is because about 80 percent of the black majority of Zimbabweans live in rural areas, and therefore most schools are in rural districts. My experience as an educator in Zimbabwe suggested that there was no role clarity between the two stakeholder ministries. This study was

motivated by, among other things, the need to examine stakeholders' experiences of how the role relationships of the two ministries influence decentralised school governance in the selected cluster.

Teaching and learning processes in both types of schools are sanctioned by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, which is headed by a Permanent Secretary who reports to the minister. Each of Zimbabwe's nine provinces has a Provincial Education Office headed by a Provincial Education Director (PED). Each district has a District Education Office headed by a District Education Director (DED). Within a district, schools are divided into circuits, supervised by Education Officers (EOs). Individual schools report to their supervising EO or to the relevant DED, depending on the matter in question. Within each circuit, schools are divided into clusters, each run by a cluster co-ordinating committee. A cluster is not an administrative reporting structure. It is a capacity building unit created to develop its stakeholders, including teachers, school heads and parent governors. Therefore, while individual schools are accountable to their cluster for agreed upon staff development activities, the latter has no authority over the day-to-day management and/or governance of a school.

1.6 Research methodology

The study is located within the broad category of qualitative research. Qualitative research adopts an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). This approach suited my quest to investigate stakeholders' understandings and experiences of, and responses to

decentralised school governance because such knowledge can only be adequately generated from and in the natural setting of schools and the education system.

Within the qualitative research realm, I adopted a multi-site case study design (Merriam, 1998), which involved each school as a site within a cluster. The schools constituted a 'case' in that they are bounded (Smith, 1987) by a common goal of working together to improve their performance collectively and individually. Despite the schools making up one case of a cluster, each individual school was to be a significant source of data, hence the multi-site design. The respondents included teachers, school heads, school governors, parents and education officials.

Qualitative research is multi-modal in focus in that it thrives on the utilisation of various modes of gathering evidence (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Consistent with this notion, the study utilised a triangulation of data collection methods, namely the questionnaire, observation, document analysis and interview methods. Through these techniques, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered. The former were analysed at the end of the collection period through frequencies and percentages and the latter, during and after collection through emerging themes.

1.7 Assumptions of the study

This study was conducted under a number of assumptions. Firstly, the study assumed that the selected cluster was typical of most clusters in the country.

Therefore, while the nature and aim of the study do not permit unchecked transferability of findings to the entire country, the implications from findings would be of some relevance to other clusters and similar contexts.

Secondly, this study assumed that decentralised school governance and how it manifests itself in the school cluster arrangement was quite topical, to the extent that the investigation would generate adequate interest among respondents, and therefore they would not unduly withhold any relevant information.

Thirdly, it assumed that decentralisation and the clustering of schools were sufficiently lasting and growing trends and therefore the study's findings would find a niche into which to contribute some valuable knowledge regarding how schools respond to innovation initiatives against the backdrop of such fundamentals as financial stringency on the one hand, and the call for improved quality of education on the other.

1.8 Organisation of the thesis

This report comprises seven chapters. This introductory chapter has sought to set the scene and introduce the study. It presented the background and purpose of the study and identified the key questions explored, as well as the assumptions under which the study was conducted.

Chapter Two reviews literature on the decentralisation of school governance. It focuses on five issues: why education systems decentralise; which

decisions are amenable to such decentralisation; why the cluster approach; what cluster models there are; and decentralisation efforts from selected countries across the globe. The chapter folds with implications of these issues for the study.

Chapter Three provides the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that informed data collection and analysis in the study. To do so the chapter begins by clarifying key concepts and issues in the study. The chapter then proceeds to examine the theoretical frameworks. The chapter closes with a set of propositions that might explain decentralisation of school governance, which are then used to analyse data in the study.

Chapter Four examines the research design and methodology adopted. It describes and justifies the research design, the sample, sampling procedures and the rationale for such sampling decisions. The chapter also describes the data collection and analysis methods I used and presents my justification for such methods and identifies the ethical considerations taken into account in the data collection process.

Chapter Five describes the research context and setting. The cluster studied is identified by the pseudonym of Chikanda. The five schools making up Chikanda cluster are also identified by pseudonyms as Boka, Pfungi, Konde, Mari and Mishi. Characteristic features of the entire cluster system, of each of the schools under study, and how these are likely to influence decentralised school governance, are articulated.

Chapter Six presents and discusses the main findings. Using the key issues emerging from the literature review, and the theoretical frameworks as analytical lenses, the chapter presents and discusses findings to the research questions posed by the study. The chapter folds with a section on issues emerging from the discussion of findings.

Chapter Seven analyses and identifies and discusses the implications of the findings for the decentralisation of school governance in this and other districts in Zimbabwe in general, and in Chikanda cluster in particular. It also forwards some implications for further research on decentralised school governance in the country and similar contexts.

CHAPTER TWO

Understanding Decentralisation of School Governance: A Review of Related Literature

The conditions are so different that you cannot govern from above any longer.²

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced and provided a background and rationale for the study. The chapter argued that while the Zimbabwean government has passed legislation and adopted policies for the decentralisation of school governance, and while for various reasons, the concept might arguably be well supported at the different levels of the education system, very little is known about how various stakeholders are interpreting and implementing the policy. Thus, through a case study of Chikanda cluster (a pseudonym), this study sought to understand the ways in which the various key stakeholders at the school and cluster levels interpreted and enacted the decentralisation policy governing Zimbabwean schools, as well as the ways they experienced the processes and products of such decentralisation.

This chapter is premised on the notion that in order to understand decentralisation of education in Zimbabwe in general, and in the cluster under study in particular, it is necessary to review related literature around why, what and how decentralisation occurs. As such, the chapter examines five

² Social Democratic politician, The Park (cited in Lundahl, 2002, p. 629).

broad issues relating to the decentralisation of school governance. First, the chapter examines some key reasons for the decentralisation of education systems. Second, the chapter examines the importance of stakeholders' readiness and capacity for decentralisation. Third, the cluster system, as a capacity building strategy and tool for successful decentralisation of education, is discussed. Fourth, because no education system can decentralise all decisions on all matters, the chapter tackles the question of which decisions tend to be, and ought to be decentralised. Finally, the chapter examines case studies of decentralisation efforts in other countries with a view to seeking implications for Zimbabwe in general and the cluster in particular.

2.2 Why decentralise?

There are numerous reasons why education systems decentralise the governance of schools. For example, Watson (2005) contends that decentralisation is seen as a means to several ends: the socio-economic transition to democracy and good governance; improved service delivery (by shifting decision-making closer to the grassroots for improved accountability and responsiveness); and the empowerment of citizens and participation in governance. According to Fiske and Ladd (2000), many reformers believe that the transferring of governance and management authority from a centralised state educational agency to schools will energise schools by giving parents and local communities a greater role in setting school missions. In the body of literature on decentralisation of education, three reasons come to the fore: affordability of education financing; increased efficiency and effectiveness;

and participatory decision-making. This section analyses each of these reasons.

2.2.1 Decentralisation and education financing

As argued in Chapter One, one of the reasons for the decentralisation of school governance in Zimbabwe seems to have been the increasing realisation that the government could no longer afford the huge spending on education that was seen as necessary after independence to address the racial and social inequalities of the past. Such reckoning about education financing is evident in much of the literature reviewed in this study. Thus, as is also evident in much of the literature reviewed in this study, one reason for decentralising school governance concerns the issue of how resources for education are raised and spent. To illustrate, Fiske and Ladd (2004) contend that international experience suggests that the major reason for the widespread practice of school fees in developing countries is that governments of such countries are unable to provide free basic education at public expense. The argument is that decentralisation will generate revenue for education from sources such as local taxation. According to Paqueo and Lammert (2000), the goal is to shift some of the financial burden for education from central government to regional or local government, community organisations, and/ or parents (see also Harber, Davies, & Dzimadzi, 2003). 'This rationale is particularly appealing to developing countries, since they often find themselves faced with severe financial constraints' (Paqueo & Lammert, 2000, p. 1). In addition, it is assumed that the active participation of

more players will lead inevitably to increased financial resources becoming available for education.

However, Karlsson (1994) finds devolving financial responsibility to school users problematic. To her, such a move threatens the principles of equal access and equal education as well as the individual's right to basic education. This is so in the sense that those unable to pay for education may fail to have access to the service. Karlsson goes on to argue that the model is attractive to well-resourced communities, but it arouses no enthusiasm among the poor. On another note, other scholars (such as Bush & Gamage, 2001; Bush & Heystek, 2003; Smyth, 1996) suggest that decisions about school financing may be decentralised so that the difficult decisions about income and expenditure, and the attendant criticism, can be deflected from central government to schools.

Reasons for decentralising educational financing in an education system are likely to have implications for how stakeholders, to whom decisions are devolved, respond to the challenge. For example, if they construe such efforts, as the mere offloading of a burden that central government could no longer shoulder, they may be resistant. However, this thesis argues that in the Zimbabwean context, continued dependence by the school users on government funding is, in itself problematic in a number of ways. For example, capacities for self-reliance, or at least some strides towards this, can never be reached when schools are solely dependent on central government funding. Furthermore, most governments, particularly those in developing countries,

including Zimbabwe, are already over-stretched in as far as educational financing is concerned (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993a). Therefore devolving financial responsibility seems to be a 'must' as opposed to a 'may': an imperative rather than an option. However, such devolution needs to be accompanied by efforts to build capacity among the target groups, not only to manage available funds, but also to generate additional ones. This study investigated how stakeholders experienced decentralised educational financing (among other things), as well as their perceptions of their capacity to function effectively therein, in the selected cluster.

Apart from financial considerations, education systems also decentralise in order to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

2.2.2 Decentralisation and efficiency and effectiveness

Decentralisation of school governance as a strategy for improving educational efficiency and effectiveness involves the ways in which educational resources are used (Paqueo & Lammert, 2000; Watson, 2005). Despite considerable diversity in the forms of self-governance of schools adopted by different countries, notions of democracy, school effectiveness and efficiency generally underpin this shift (Bush & Heystek, 2005). To illustrate, an efficient system is one that consumes minimal resources (both material, financial and human) to achieve maximal goals. School effectiveness, on the other hand, concerns the achievement of goals within specified time frames (Coleman, 2003a; , 2003b; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993b; Harber & Davies, 1997). The two concepts of efficiency and effectiveness, while not synonymous, are closely

related. An efficient system is most likely to achieve its goals, because it utilises its resources to sound effect; and an effective system is what it is as a function (among others) of its efficiency.

The argument for decentralising education in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the system is that decentralisation eliminates red tape and motivates officials to be more productive (McGinn & Welsh, 1999; Paqueo & Lammert, 2000). In a centralised system, decisions are made far away from the school, where the decisions are to be implemented. Thus, allowing local government units or stakeholders in the grassroots of the system to make decisions on matters such as resource allocation is expected to result in better efficiency and effectiveness.

Karlsson (1994) challenges the above view and argues that decentralisation does not necessarily guarantee efficiency. To her, decentralisation can create numerous decision-making layers, which may slow down administrative processes. Karlsson is, however, quick to point out that in a situation of rapid educational expansion, as has been the case in Zimbabwe, decentralisation can reduce the administrative burden on central government.

Developing the argument that decentralisation does not necessarily guarantee efficiency, Karlsson (1994) draws on the findings from studies of three different countries. She begins by arguing that, as a reaction to the policies of the former colonial rulers, after independence, many African countries handed over governance powers to regions. For example, reporting on Namibia, Karlsson (1994) observes that in 1990, the country began the restructuring of

its education system on the principle of centralised administration and decentralised delivery of services. The main reasons for this structure were to ensure greater efficiency as well as to dispense with the apartheid-style education system that had prevailed in the country. The restructuring exercise reduced the number of administrative structures from eleven to seven.

Regions were accorded coordinating powers and, in aspects of education such as personnel, they became autonomous. While Karlsson acknowledges that restructuring in Namibia was still in a transitional phase at the time of her writing, and therefore it was too early to assess whether administrative efficiency had been achieved, she reports of resistance among those within the system who felt threatened by the change and those who lacked managerial expertise to implement the changes.

As this thesis argues in the case of Zimbabwe, the Namibian scenario seems to suggest that decentralising education must be accompanied by capacity building and professional development, so that stakeholders who are expected to shoulder the responsibility of governance in a decentralised system can cope with the change. Probing this contingency, this study investigated stakeholders' perceptions of their capacity to understand and implement decentralised school governance as an innovation.

The Namibian experience also suggests that any change that, in one way or another, threatens the targeted implementers and the potential beneficiaries is most likely to jeopardise its own success. As this thesis will argue in Chapter Three, stakeholders constitute an important context that needs to be

understood and taken into account when implementing any innovation. Thus, the study investigated how stakeholders understood and experienced decentralisation.

Karlsson (1994) also gives an account of Tanzania, which decentralised primary and adult education in 1972. Karlsson reports, however, that problems were encountered in the deployment of staff, and the distribution of educational materials and finances at district level. Again, the major causes were the lack of managerial capacity to run a decentralised system, tensions between officials at different levels, and a lack of genuine participation in decision-making at the local level. Without real community involvement, the layers of decentralised administration were largely seen as extensions of central government.

The Tanzanian scenario seems to reveal that debate on, and efforts to decentralise education are old but perennial and complex matters. Again, the need for capacity to run a decentralised system features prominently. In addition, concerning genuine participation in decision-making by the grassroots stakeholders, one sees the danger of systems pretending that people are involved when in practice they are not. As Chapter Three will show, perhaps most education systems never devolve decision-making authority, but they merely delegate it. In other words, it is one thing to neatly formulate the provisions that lay down statutory structures, but it is another to implement those structures. In this light, this study sought to examine how those to whom decision-making power was supposedly decentralised had

experienced it and whether they felt able and prepared to shoulder the attendant responsibility. While decentralisation holds potential for achieving efficiency and effectiveness in school governance, the experience from Tanzania indicates that it does not necessarily follow that all such efforts will yield the intended result. As such, this study also examined factors that hinder and/or enable successful decentralisation.

Of particular relevance to this study, reporting on Zimbabwe, Karlsson (1994) observes that the post-independence education system delegated power to regional offices to be responsible for development and coordination. This was aimed at improving administrative efficiency as well as ensuring a governance structure that was consistent with the democratic process of self-rule.

Karlsson adds that pressures to deliver education to a population with high post-independence expectations led to the rapid expansion of the system. Under such circumstances, as Karlsson rightly argues, quality and local community involvement are easily neglected.

As observed in Chapter One, Zimbabwe has now shifted its focus, from quantitative to greater qualitative growth in education. If, during its formative years after independence, Zimbabwe delegated power to regional offices of education, this study sought to examine, through the lens of one cluster of schools, 25 years later, whether there would be any indications of a subsequent shift beyond mere delegation towards devolution of decision-making in school governance. The devolution would entail participatory decision-making among stakeholders, which is another of the foremost

reasons proffered for decentralisation. The next section examines this reason in more detail.

2.2.3 Decentralisation and participatory decision-making

Barberger (1986), Weiler (1990), McGinn and Welsh (1999), and Watson (2005) refer to political motives for decentralisation. For example, according to McGinn and Welsh (1999), in most parts of the world there is a groundswell of enthusiasm for increased participation in public decision-making by various societal groups (or stakeholders), particularly among those that have, or claim to have, been previously excluded from decision-making processes. Writing in the context of South Africa, Sayed (cited in Bush & Heystek, 2005, p. 164) links the emphasis on stakeholders to the ideal of participation in South Africa following the demise of apartheid, which was an authoritarian and highly centralised decision-making system:

The notion of grassroots community participation was constituted in the context of a state which was oppressive and where the state itself was the primary apparatus of oppression. Thus, grassroots community control was the antithesis of state control. Power to the people as opposed to that of the state reflected a strong commitment to participatory democracy and the decentralisation of control.

This political rationale for decentralisation places governing bodies (the equivalent of Zimbabwe's school development committees) in an important position in the running of schools. While they are no 'quick fix' solution, governing bodies are well placed to address local problems and contribute to long-term school improvement (Bush & Heystek, 2003).

Paqueo and Lammert (2000) argue that the participatory democracy motive aims to restore legitimacy to institutions by redistributing power and giving citizens a greater management role in schools. Indeed, Karlsson *et al.* (2001) contend that in South Africa, this aim was the motivation for the involvement of parents in School Governing Bodies as promulgated by the *South African Schools Act* (1996).

Karlsson (1994) points out that associating decentralisation with democracy is based on the thinking that a decentralised education system grants more people access to decision-making, implying that a decentralised system is better than a centralised one. However, to Karlsson, an opportunity for greater participation does not guarantee that a wider spread of stakeholders, including peasants and the socially disadvantaged, will be involved. To illustrate this, she reports that in Papua New Guinea there is local stakeholder participation, but the less educated members of the community are reluctant to be involved. The scarcity of skilled people in that country has therefore caused local governance structures to continue to reflect gender, ethnic, residential and other disparities. In Zimbabwe, while high enthusiasm for increased participation in school governance seems to prevail among stakeholders, it is questionable that they all have the necessary knowledge and skills to function effectively in a decentralised governance system. It is equally questionable whether decentralised decision-making power is equitably distributed among all the stakeholders. This study investigated these issues.

Having discussed three reasons tendered in support of decentralisation, the next section examines stakeholders' readiness and capacity for implementing an innovation, in this case decentralised school governance.

2.3 Some critique of decentralisation

The beauty and attraction in the concept of decentralisation does not always materialise in practice (Cheng, 2002). Some of the shortcomings of decentralisation are articulated in two of the three theoretical frameworks of this study: The Policy Implementation Dilemmas theory and the Locus of Decentralised Decision-making theory (See Chapter Three of this thesis). This section highlights observations of pitfalls quite common in the international literature on the notion and process of decentralisation.

The decentralisation movement assumes that the problems in today's schools are caused by the highly centralised control to which schools have become subject (Sackney & Dibski, 1994). The highly bureaucratised system is argued to be incompatible with the education system as a professional organisation. The assumption is that decisions are better made closer to where they are implemented (the school), and if this happens, greater satisfaction will prevail. However, simply changing the organisational structure does not result in more autonomy for those in the lower levels of the system. As rightly argued by David (1989b), Brown (1990) and Smyth and van der Vegt (1993), it is difficult for those holding power to relinquish their authority. Therefore decentralisation efforts often fail because those in power appear to share authority without, in fact, surrendering authority. In a sense, government bureaucracies are not

designed for decentralisation, yet they are the ones that initiate most decentralisation policies.

In processes of decentralisation, there is often a tendency for governments to wash their hands off such responsibilities as school financing and other routine decisions (Cheng, 2002), and to delegate such decisions to non-professionals such as school boards, district councils, and the like. These stakeholders may have little understanding of the interface between themselves and the professionals. In the end the professional standard of the school suffers because the professionals do not have the necessary discretion to make critical decisions. Also, decentralisation may lead to serious under-resourcing of schools, particularly among rural settings such as the one studied for this thesis, where communities' resource bases are minimal.

Research (for example, see Brown, 1990; David, 1989b; Glickman, 1990) suggests that schools do not look different under decentralisation. This raises the question: Where is the substance of decentralisation and empowerment? (Sackney & Dibski, 1994). School effectiveness does not seem to be contingent upon decentralisation, although this is not to argue against the suggested link. Sackney and Dibski rightly argue that what is required is for cultural norms, values, assumptions and belief systems to change. Only then is decentralisation likely to realise its potential.

2.4 Readiness for decentralisation

In the context of the above discussion on some of the reasons for decentralisation, the need for a decentralising system that prepares stakeholders for this change seems to emerge. Stakeholders need to be ready for the innovation if it is to take root in the system. As such, it is necessary to explore the issue of readiness further. One of the research questions in this study specifically relates to this: Do stakeholders in Chikanda cluster feel capable to implement decentralised decision-making? This thesis argues that if stakeholders are to be effectively involved in school governance decision-making, they need capacity in the form of knowledge and skills. Such capacity may not be readily present and abundant among the stakeholders, in which case it needs to be developed. Thus, this study investigated how one capacity-builder, the Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ), was coping with this responsibility. Thus this section reviews what other scholars have written about preparing for decentralisation innovations.

McGinn and Welsh (1999) hint that for successful implementation of any reform (for example, decentralisation), two conditions must be met. First, there must be political support for the proposed change. In concurrence, Watson (2005) reports that in Ethiopia, political consensus (that devolution must be made to work, and that local accountability structures have an important role to play) was an essential ingredient for decentralisation.

Second, those involved in the reform must be capable of carrying it out. According to these authors, many decentralisation reforms have failed to

achieve their objectives because they did not adequately meet one or both of the conditions. To illustrate, McGinn and Welsh observe that reforms that involve local communities are likely to fail if community members lack experience and skills in collective decision-making and organisational management. Along the same vein, other scholars (for example, see Karlsson, 1994; and Watson, 2005) suggest that introducing decentralisation without adequate preparation will emphasise tensions that are already present in society.

In the Zimbabwean context, there seems to be adequate evidence of political support for decentralisation. As reported in Chapter One, government has legally established grassroots structures to run a decentralised education system. Also, the post-independence era has been characterised by the Zimbabwean society having high expectations and interest in education (Karlsson, 1994). Such interest and expectations were informed by the notion that education is the major instrument for emancipation from unemployment, poverty, ignorance and all other ills associated with oppression. What is not clear yet is the extent to which stakeholders in Zimbabwe are capable of functioning effectively in a decentralised system of school governance. It is worthwhile at this stage to examine what is proposed in the literature as some of the specific capacities generally required for participation in school governance.

McGinn and Welsh (1999) provide a useful discussion in this regard. Of interest to this study are their suggested capacities for staff (i.e. employees in

the education system) and those for citizens (such as parents). One area of capacity suggested by these scholars is a commitment to management rather than administration. The concept of management refers to the planning, controlling, and coordinating functions in an organisation, while administration refers to the day-to-day implementation functions of ideas already planned (Bush, 2003b). In a centralised education system, decision-making is 'top-down', whereby senior managers take strategic decisions on behalf of their subordinates. Under such a system, managers and staff within schools are largely expected to merely implement decisions. It is not deemed to be their business to engage in strategic planning. Consistent with this structure, evaluation of school performance tends to be the job of officers in higher echelons of the education system, who would measure performance in terms of levels of conformity to 'externally' set standards. In a decentralised education system, it is expected that teachers and school heads must become leaders and managers in their own right. Thus, this study investigated not only the prevalence of such competences, but also stakeholders' understandings and experiences of becoming leaders and managers in a decentralised school system.

Another area of competence identified by McGinn and Welsh (1999) is the capacity for diversity, as opposed to homogeneity and conformity, in the running of a school. Homogeneity and conformity would entail all schools being run in the same way and in strict accordance with prescriptions from authorities in higher offices outside the school (such as the Ministry of Education). As was shown above in the way that centralisation constitutes

top-down management, homogeneity and conformity are downstream effects of the centralised system of school governance. By contrast, the capacity for diversity would allow for local differentiation and customisation in the way individual schools and clusters run their affairs, in response to the imperatives of their unique situations.

In the light of new global challenges facing the governance of schools today such as the need for local communities to contribute to the financing of their schools, and the need to offer competitive curricula within the constraints of limited resources, creativity on the part of those tasked to govern schools, in terms of generating home-grown solutions to problems, becomes essential (Olssen, Cadd, & O'Neill, 2004). To develop their capacity for creativity, schools and school clusters would have to examine and re-examine their individual situations and find unique solutions to their peculiar problems. However, this is only possible within the context of an enabling legal framework, as well as a skilled and knowledgeable school and cluster community.

McGinn and Welsh (1999) suggest the participation of parents in the governance and provision of education as yet another capability required for successful decentralisation. The involvement of parents in school affairs has tended to start and, in many cases, be restricted to the area of finance, for which parents are seen as a source of revenue for the education system (Paqueo & Lammert, 2000). Other areas of school governance have tended to be left to professionals, such as school heads. However, decentralisation

demands that stakeholders other than those employed in school should be much more involved in what goes on in school. For this, the staff of a school will have to shift its thinking and begin to accept and encourage citizen participation. Among those expected to be involved in school governance decision-making, some will be forthcoming while others may be unwilling or incapable. This emphasises the need for capacities to be developed and attitudes to be changed. It seems that both the initiators of wider stakeholder involvement and those to be initiated need to develop knowledge and skills necessary to effectively participate in school governance, hence this study's focus on stakeholders' capacity as one of the critical issues.

Another area that McGinn and Welsh (1999) identify for building stakeholder capacity is three interrelated basic skills. First of these are basic skills such as literacy and numeracy so that people can actively and meaningfully participate in decision-making processes. This capacity need cannot be over-emphasized. It would be disempowering to involve uninformed members of society who do not have these skills in school governance affairs. It may be that part of the reason behind a lack of interest in school affairs among some members of the community is their feeling of inadequacy in the requisite knowledge and skills of reading, writing and numeracy.

Second, the authors identify basic organisational and management skills as an interrelated area for development. This is a broad area, which may encompass skills such as time and material resources management, teamwork, record making and keeping, and accountability. Such skills seem

essential, given that decentralisation of education entails the handling of information on the basis of which decisions are made. Stakeholders shall have to attend meetings, chair some of these, refer to circulars, and budget resources, among many things. All these activities cannot be under-estimated in terms of the capacities required to perform and cope with them. In contexts in which illiteracy or semi-literacy is high, the need for capacity building becomes more essential and complex.

Third, McGinn and Welsh (1999) also identify communication skills as another interrelated basic capacity that is required. They further suggest that communication skills need to be supported by access to basic communication infrastructure such as roads, telephones, radio, and television. The question of infrastructure re-affirms an issue raised earlier in this chapter: the need for political support for decentralisation efforts to succeed. Therefore, it is necessary to link and harmonise decentralisation of education with other development efforts in society. Apart from infrastructure, it is most probable that school governing body members would need these skills to be able to interact fully with government officials, with professional staff in the school, among themselves, and for when they report back to their constituencies. From my experience of living and working in rural Zimbabwe, I contend that while most parent governors would be able to read and write in their home language, they are likely to lack the more advanced skills for fully understanding statutory and other legal instruments that regulate their behaviour as school governors. This situation may become an inhibitor to successful decentralisation.

Overall, capacities required for successful decentralisation are likely to vary from one school situation to another. However, based on my review of the literature above and my experience in Zimbabwe, it is probable that there is a need for capacity building in all cases. The implication is that stakeholders must be ready and capable of functioning effectively in a decentralised system. It would be counter-productive to let decentralisation efforts fail because those with authority for decision-making are not able to exercise it effectively. Hence, there is a need for capacity building and professional development among stakeholders.

The next section examines one strategy that has been adopted by a number of countries, including Zimbabwe, as a capacity-building tool: the cluster system.

2.5 The school cluster system

As reported in Chapter One, one strategy that has been adopted in many parts of the world, including Zimbabwe, to develop capacity and thereby enhance the successful implementation of innovations, is the school cluster system. According to Educational Quality Review (2004), school-based and cluster teacher in-service professional development programmes have become widespread and popular in recent years in both industrialised and developing countries. Educational Quality Review contends that several elements have come together and created the environment for change, prompting education systems to recognise the necessity for ongoing career-long support programmes for educators. These elements include widespread

curriculum reforms that emphasise active learning and teacher change. An example of this is outcomes-based education in South Africa (Media in Education Trust, 2004). A second element is the growing realisation of the central role that teacher quality plays in improving educational quality. The third element is the declining quality of education as a consequence of rapid growth and expansion of education in the absence of sufficient resources. Mass education in Zimbabwe serves as a relevant example of this element (Dorsey, Matshazi, & Nyagura, 1991). This study is located within one such cluster in which these elements manifest, therefore it is necessary to briefly survey the literature around school clusters and consider the implications for this study.

2.5.1 The genesis of clusters

As reported in Chapter One, the cluster concept has grown largely from developments in educational micro planning (Bray, 1984; , 1987; Dittmar, Mendelsohn, & Ward, 2002). Bray (1987) reports that proponents of micro planning argue that even in the smallest country, it is impossible for a central ministry of education to know the specific conditions of every school and its locality. Thus, while it remains essential to have a national framework within which all schools operate, it is equally essential to treat each locality as an entity in itself (Dittmar, Mendelsohn, & Ward, 2002). Thus, micro planning implies a degree of decentralisation of decision-making, in this case to clusters of schools. Such planning is envisaged to bring about stronger local participation in decision-making as well as collaboration for addressing common concerns.

According to Bray (1987), the cluster system is also informed by the dilemmas in which education systems in most developing countries find themselves. On the one hand developing countries suffer severe financial stringency as a result of the poor performance of their economies. On the other, they have to satisfy a rising demand for education, as education is seen as the major instrument for emancipation.

Because of the educational dilemmas reported above, clusters have been particularly popular all over the developing world, for example in Latin American countries such as Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Peru (Bray, 1987). In Africa, school clusters are also used in many countries such as Burundi, Ethiopia, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Media in Education Trust, 2004). However, as argued above, collaboration among schools seems to have gained currency even in the developed world. To illustrate, in the United Kingdom, Glatter *et al.* (2005) report of the Diversity Pathfinder initiative as one of a substantial number of initiatives in which school collaboration is a central feature. According to these authors, the Diversity Pathfinder initiative aims to (among others) develop collaborative working so that schools' individual strengths and expertise benefit each other.

As pointed out in Chapter One, there is also a rising concern for improved quality of education. The need to achieve both quantitative and qualitative advances within the framework of financial austerity has forced governments

to seek alternative and innovative ways to achieve their cherished goals.

School clusters have become one such innovation.

Bray (1987, p. 7) defines a cluster as 'a grouping of schools for administrative and educational purposes'. In the same vein, Dittmar, Mendelsohn and Ward, (2002) define it as a group of schools that are geographically as close and accessible to each other as possible, serving various purposes such as developing management and teaching practices. Spannenberg and Brown (2003) refer to it as a structure for mutual support and cooperative work towards teachers' own professional development. In concurrence with the definitions above, the Media in Education Trust (2004) sees a cluster as an organisational tool comprising schools that are grouped together for the purpose of service delivery. The Zimbabwean conceptualisation of a cluster as a group of schools within the same geographical location that have agreed to come together to share ideas, resources and problems on how to improve the quality and relevance of education in their respective institutions (Mavesera, Madungwe, Seremwe, & Moyana, 2000), seems to be consistent with what the literature reported above suggests.

2.5.2 Common purposes of cluster schemes

Bray (1987) observes that a survey of cluster schemes shows that they serve many common purposes. In order to develop a clearer understanding of the cluster under study in this thesis, it is necessary to examine some of these purposes. Chief among the purposes of cluster schemes are economic, pedagogic, and political ends (Botha, 2003; Bray, 1987; Dittmar, Mendelsohn,

& Ward, 2002; Education Quality Review, 2004; Gymraig, 2001; Leu, 2004; Mavesera, Madungwe, Seremwe, & Moyana, 2000; Media in Education Trust, 2004).

2.5.2.1 Economic purposes

The key economic objective of most cluster schemes is to improve cost-effectiveness. This may be achieved through sharing facilities, human and material resources, as well as skills and knowledge. The rationale behind such a scheme is that if schools are grouped together, they can share costs and utilise resources more effectively (Media in Education Trust, 2004). While increased intensity in the utilisation of material resources may accelerate wear and tear and thereby reduce the life span of such resources, productivity would have been increased. On this basis, intensive use of resources is justifiable. Dittmar, Mendelsohn and Ward (2002) contend that the cluster system in Namibia, where the system is still in its formative years, is suitable for sharing resources in a variety of ways. For example, the cluster system provides a framework for the planning of all regional development activities for facilities such as roads, electricity and telephone services; it can be used for planning of donor assistance programmes; government administrative offices can use clusters to deliver their services to schools; and HIV and AIDS programmes can train facilitators in each cluster to coordinate educational and counselling activities. These authors' notion of the cluster as a multi-purpose structure is consistent with the Media in Education Trust's (2004) findings from a study of clusters in South Africa.

A similar economic objective of school clustering is the mobilisation of extra resources (Bray, 1987; Education Quality Review, 2004; Leu, 2004). This objective is usually informed by local school conditions, where available resources might be far and few between and sharing them is untenable in the long run. Such a situation in Pakistan is reported by the Education Quality Review (2004). The Review states that the USAID-funded Releasing Confidence and Creativity Programme aimed at building sound foundations for early learning through work with schools, policy engagement, and networking. Using school clustering, this Programme facilitated resource mobilisation for early childhood education activities by targeting key local decision-makers in a given geographic area.

The need to share facilities, as well as to generate more resources, constituted some of the rallying points for school clusters in Zimbabwe. This study sought to investigate stakeholders' understandings and experiences in this regard. The study argues that in the Chikanda cluster, there is neither significant sharing nor generation of additional resources, because of their thinness on the ground and incapacity on the part of stakeholders respectively. These factors would negatively impact on the decentralisation attempts.

2.5.2.2 Pedagogic purposes

Pedagogic purposes, which involve the pursuit of quality education within individual schools, are another function (Bray, 1987; Education Quality Review, 2004; Leu, 2004). According to these authors, the sharing of resources discussed above is one key way through which clusters can help

improve school quality. Access to facilities and staff of other schools is likely to enrich the individual institution.

However, these scholars propose that there are also other ways of improving educational quality, three of which are pertinent to this study. First is teacher development. On the one hand, the teaching profession tends to restrict teachers to their classrooms. On the other, parents are quick to cry foul if teachers are seen outside their classrooms, let alone outside their school campuses (Education International, 1996). Many teachers are, thus, rather isolated from sources that might assist them to improve the quality of their teaching (Dittmar, Mendelsohn, & Ward, 2002). The cluster system provides possibilities for encouraging them to be more outward looking, to share ideas and to confront problems in the comfort of significant others. In this context, more enthusiastic teachers might energise tired ones, and more experienced ones might mentor those who are less experienced. The more educated might assist the less educated, and so on, and as such these encounters act as a form of teacher development. To illustrate, in its Decentralised Basic Education Programme in Indonesia, which is aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning in public and private sector primary schools, the Education Development Centre utilises what it refers to as Master Teacher Trainers to manage training at the cluster and facilitate activities at the district and school levels. Master Teacher Trainers are creative and motivated teachers recruited and trained to serve in this capacity (Education Development Centre, 2004). The Indonesian model also positions local and international partner universities as the central nodes from which teacher

professional development materials are developed to respond to the country's increasingly decentralised educational environment. Thus, partnerships can go beyond the schools themselves to harness other expertise.

The second strategy for improving educational quality through a cluster scheme is shared curriculum development (Bray, 1987; Dittmar, Mendelsohn, & Ward, 2002). Curriculum development workshops in a cluster may provide for the trying out of new learning materials and teaching methods, production of teaching aids, exploration of new syllabi, holding of demonstration lessons, reviews of learners' performance in national examinations, the revision of old curricula, and so on. To illustrate this and the preceding strategy, Education Quality Review (2004) reports that as part of a broader Quality and Equity Project to improve teaching and learning in elementary schools, the government of Guinea and USAID/Guinea introduced clusters in 1999.

Two features they instituted to ensure that clusters became learning communities were schools taking turns to host the bimonthly meetings; and a highly respected principal or teacher leader from a cluster school being appointed to facilitate sessions. They also instituted two learning strategies for the same purpose: round table discussions and peer observations. Education Quality Review reports further that cluster leaders invite teachers to share their experiences about what new strategies or approaches they have explored in recent times, and to reflect on how and why these worked. As well, twice a year, teachers visit a cluster colleague's classroom to observe the new approaches and strategies in action. Because schools are meant to

be learning centres, the curriculum should become the focal point of all activities therein.

To illustrate, in a learning organisation (such as a school or cluster of schools), Davidoff and Lazarus (1997) argue that classrooms (in which teachers are most competent) form only one aspect of schooling. It is what happens in the school as a whole that determines the overall nature and quality of educational experiences. Thus if the nature and quality of schooling for all are to be improved (for example through decentralised school governance), all aspects of the school (human and material resources, the curriculum, school governance, and so on) need to interrelate. In the event that this does not happen, there is bound to be a ripple effect throughout the organisation and the desired change will fail to materialise. Thus, it follows that decentralisation of decision-making to the cluster and school levels should allow local stakeholders to embark on their own development efforts, including curriculum development, in response to local and national imperatives.

The third strategy for improving the quality of education through a cluster concerns competition among pupils. For many years in the past, competitions have tended to be restricted to sporting activities in many schools (Bray, 1987). In the present period they are organised for academic activities as well. The latter activities may take the form of common tests, which enable benchmarking whereby schools measure their own standards and encourage pupils to work harder. Competitions can also be arranged in areas such as environmental management and community projects such as HIV and AIDS

campaigns. However, while competition is likely to encourage people to work harder, it can also rear enmity and antagonism among the competitors in their quest to win. For this reason, competition should not be allowed to kill the cooperative spirit behind the clustering of schools. Describing the Namibian schools cluster scenario, and consistent with the notion of healthy competitiveness, Dittmar, Mendelsohn and Ward (2002) refer to the development of a constructive competitive spirit between schools as one of the goals. This suggests, as I have argued later in this thesis regarding the Zimbabwean scenario, that some competition may be unhealthy and inconsistent with the collaborative spirit behind the cluster concept.

These pedagogical purposes of school clusters are very noble. The objectives of school clusters in Zimbabwe, through the BSPZ, seem to be consistent with such purposes. However, it takes sound organisational skills, as well as knowledge and expertise on the part of all stakeholders, to achieve these purposes. This study was conceived against the background that it was not evident that such knowledge and skill existed in the Zimbabwean system. Thus the study investigated stakeholders' experiences regarding their cluster's attempts to achieve such goals and the factors that facilitate or inhibit such efforts.

2.5.2.3 Political purposes

Politically, clusters can serve several purposes. For purposes of this study, two such objectives deserve particular mention: conscientisation and community participation. Paulo Freire, the great Brazilian education theorist coined the concept of 'conscientisation' (Bray, 1987). It means the raising of

general awareness or consciousness among people. To illustrate, Educational Quality Review (2004) reports that when USAID/Haiti and its partners implemented a cluster approach, complete with programmes for school directors, pedagogic teams, and parent-teacher associations, relationships among schools started to change for the better. In Haiti's programme, like in Zimbabwe, all schools in a cluster were granted equal status. According to Educational Quality Review (2004), this very democratic approach to school clusters fostered real change at the school and community levels. In the same vein, Botha (2003), writing about the potential of school clusters in South Africa, contends that cluster-run multi-media centres can become vibrant spaces for community life and learning. Through such approaches, school clusters can raise community awareness of what they can do as a group, to improve the performance of their schools. This arrangement can raise awareness about how neighbouring schools tackle similar problems, what resources could be jointly utilised and what knowledge and skills could be shared.

While conscientisation necessarily requires community participation, the latter term follows the former and encourages community members to be active in decision-making processes in their communities (Media in Education Trust, 2004). For example, after developing awareness that ownership of schools has been placed in their hands, communities need to participate in generating solutions to problems that arise from such ownership. Questions such as how resources and energies can be harnessed on behalf of schools, what parents want from schools, what schools want from parents and what the appropriate

models for co-operation are, would be pertinent for sound school-community interaction (Coombe, 1996; Education Quality Review, 2004).

While political objectives should not be an end of themselves, they are pre-requisites for achieving other cluster purposes. Thus, in decentralised decision-making, failure to serve such political objectives is bound to exclude or alienate key stakeholders such as parents, which in turn may pose problems about the legitimacy of decisions. This study investigated stakeholders' experiences regarding the levels of consciousness and participation in school governance in Chikanda cluster.

The preceding discussion about school clusters points to the existence of a number of models of such systems. In order to understand Zimbabwean school clusters better, it is necessary to examine some of the existing models that have a bearing on this investigation.

2.5.3 Some cluster models

Literature suggests that there are various cluster models, each depending on a specific factor: the basis for cluster formation; the appointment of leaders; financing; the coverage; and the size (see Bray, 1987; Education Quality Review, 2004; Media in Education Trust, 2004). Educational Quality Review (2004) identifies three models: the *ad hoc* and loosely organised; the partially or wholly structured; and the highly structured. Of greatest interest to this study are three of Bray's (1987) models because they provide a framing for the nature of clusters in Zimbabwe. Bray's models correspond well to those of

Educational Quality Review and this section examines a combination of them as they relate to the present study.

Within the generic model governed by the basis for cluster formation, Bray identifies three models on a continuum: the extreme, the intermediate and the least extreme. These three are synonymous to Educational Quality Review's three models. In the extreme or far-reaching model (highly structured), cluster committees have very wide decision-making powers. For example, in Sri Lanka and Thailand, such committees recommend staff for promotion. In Sri Lanka, cluster committees can transfer staff within the schools in their clusters. In Bray's intermediate model (partially or wholly structured), schools are formally grouped together by higher authorities, but the cluster committees wield far less extensive powers than those available in the extreme model. The intermediate cluster committee cannot transfer staff among its schools nor make recommendations for promotion. This type of model exists in Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea, among other countries. In the least extreme model (*ad hoc* and loosely organised), membership of a cluster is voluntary. In as much as schools group themselves together, they can abandon the association if they so wish. Usually the schools appoint committees to organise meetings and to supervise the implementation of decisions. There are very few sanctions to regulate the behaviour of member schools. Bray (1987) asserts that this type of cluster may be found in many parts of the Developing World.

Clusters in Zimbabwe seem to fall under the *intermediate* model in that schools are formally grouped together by the authorities, but the cluster does not have extensive powers, such as to make recommendations on staff promotions. However, the Zimbabwean system also seems to manifest elements of the least extreme model in that there is no legal instrument to regulate membership, although every school is expected to belong to a cluster. This thesis postulates that the amount of influence a cluster has on its members is likely to have an impact on the nature and extent of decisions made in the system. The study asserts that while this model allows for flexibility and cluster autonomy, it is counter productive in that clusters may end up not achieving much. Indeed, the cluster under study is a culprit in this regard. Thus, this inquiry investigated how this intermediate model influenced decentralised school governance in Chikanda cluster.

The second model pertains to the appointment of cluster leaders (Dittmar, Mendelsohn, & Ward, 2002; Media in Education Trust, 2004). According to Bray (1987), in some systems the cluster head is appointed by the government and holds the post on a permanent basis. In other systems the head is elected by the members and only holds office for a fixed term. The advantage of the former arrangement is that an individual with permanent appointment is better able to plan ahead. Yet such a cluster head works with the knowledge that their contract can be terminated if performance is unsatisfactory. The advantage of the system of elections, on the other hand, is that it is based on participatory decision-making of the people affected. The electorate has a better understanding of all candidates' abilities and limitations

than anybody else outside the cluster and therefore will elect their head wisely.

In Zimbabwe, the appointment of cluster leaders follows the latter approach. The elected leadership operates on a part-time basis, and retains full workloads in their respective schools. However, at the district level, the Education Ministry appoints the Education Officer responsible for The Better Schools Programme (among other duties), and the District Resource Teacher. These appointees work full time (see also Chapter Four). Overall, it appears that cluster leadership and the route through which it has come into being are crucial matters that could have a lasting impact on the functioning of the organisation. This investigation examined stakeholders' experiences of how the nature of cluster leadership impacts on decentralised school governance.

The third model relates to financing. In some systems, governments provide clusters with extra resources, such as administrative staff and additional funding. In others, clusters are expected to look after themselves. The approach that is followed tends to depend on whether or not the education authorities have any extra resources for this purpose. In the case of Zimbabwe, where one of the driving forces for decentralisation was the need to cut costs on the part of central government, cluster financing has been left entirely to clusters themselves in the post-donor era since 2002. What seems to emerge is that clusters that are expected to survive without resources tend to be fragile and vulnerable. Where clusters have resources of their own, they tend to find it easier to achieve coherence and command respect. This study

examined stakeholders' experiences of how the financial standing of the cluster influences decentralised school governance.

The cluster structure seems to be a useful model for developing capacity among stakeholders at the grassroots levels of education systems. Such capacity is crucial for successful decentralisation. However, a lot has still to be learned about the functioning of these structures. To illustrate, in its report on the effectiveness of the clustering strategy in South Africa, the Media in Education Trust (2004) notes that stakeholders' understandings of a cluster differed from cluster to cluster and from one service provider to another. This suggests that such stakeholders have different experiences of clusters, and therefore they are bound to respond differently to the intervention. This study was motivated to investigate these issues in the Zimbabwean context.

2.6 Which decisions tend to be decentralised?

One of the burning issues in the decentralisation debate relates to the categories of decisions that are decentralised. As McGinn and Welsh (1999) argue that the extent to which preconditions for decentralisation varies from country to country, it follows that countries have different objectives for decentralisation. They, therefore, opt differently for the decision categories that are decentralised. Thus, decentralisation of education governance should not be regarded as a uniform phenomenon world-wide. Rather, it is likely to differ across countries. In order to understand the Zimbabwean decentralisation context better, it is necessary to examine the discourse of decision-making categories.

In all cases, decision-making is about who has the power to make those decisions, among other things. According to Caldwell and Spinks (1992), power, the ability, right or authority to control people or events, is one of the major resources, which organisations allocate to its members. Foucault (1994) has advanced the view that all knowledge is a product of power relations. According to Foucault, power is exercised through discourses such as education. He argues that in most modern societies, the education system is controlled by the state, and the latter exercises power through educational policies such as core curriculum, systems of assessment, school management, and so on. Earlier in 1972 Foucault (as cited in 1994, p. 46) wrote about schooling as follows:

But we know very well that, in its distribution, in what it permits and what it prevents, it follows the lines laid down by social differences, conflicts and struggles. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, with the knowledge and power they bring with them.

In concurrence with Foucault, Robbins (1983) contends that an organisational structure, at any given time, is to a large extent the result of those in power in it. That power group selects a structure that will, to the maximum degree possible, maintain and enhance their control. In the same vein, Bolman and Deal (1990) argue that organisations are political arenas that are 'alive and screaming', and which house a complex variety of individuals and interest groups. They contend that five propositions summarise the political perspective: most decisions in organisations involve the allocation of scarce resources; organisations are coalitions composed of individuals and interest groups; individuals and interest groups differ in their held values, preferences, beliefs, information, and perceptions of reality; organisational decisions

emerge from ongoing processes of bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position; and in the presence of scarce resources and protracted differences, power and conflict are central features of organisational life.

Given the above analysis, devolving decision-making power to school governance structures is likely to be fraught with problems. This is because those in positions of control at any level of the hierarchy (for example, the school head) are likely to want to monopolise decision-making so that decisions entrench and favour their position. Decentralisation seems to be more amenable to the human resource frame, which tends to focus on forms of influence that enhance mutuality and collaboration in decision-making (Bolman and Deal, 1990). The ambition of this frame is that managers and workers can make decisions jointly to meet the needs of both, by so doing, sharing power. Thus, decentralising power entails devolving authority to make decisions. In a devolved decision-making scenario, the location of power shifts from the centre of the system or organisation to its periphery. In the case of the education system, the shift is from senior managers at the administrative centre of the system to clusters and individual schools where teaching and learning occurs. This study revolved around such a decentralisation of decision-making powers. In the next few paragraphs, specific areas needing power to decide upon are discussed. Suffice it to point out at this stage that any valid decentralisation must devolve decision-making power. This study particularly focused on power to make decisions relating to school governance. As reflected in Chapter Three, the study postulates that

stakeholders at the school level in the present study do not experience substantial decision-making power.

McInerney (2003) cites Caldwell and Spinks (1992), two of the chief architects and advocates for the self-managing school in Australia. These scholars advance the view that a self-managing school exists in a system where there has been substantial and consistent decentralisation of decision-making authority to the school level. The decentralised areas of decision-making include the allocation of material resources, curriculum, pedagogy, deployment of human resources and the allocation of finances. Concurring with the view that the scope of local empowerment varies greatly from system to system, the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (2002) contends that decentralised decisions usually fall within three categories: budget, personnel and staffing, and curriculum. These observations point at important areas of school business that may be decentralised. This section reviews these and other decisions as they relate to the Zimbabwean context in general, and the present study in particular.

2.6.1 Decisions about governance

Rideout and Ural (1993) give governance as one category of decision-making that needs to be considered for decentralisation. The authors view governance as entailing decisions to do with making education policies, and oversight of the planning and implementation processes. This interpretation is consistent with the way the concept has been explained and is used in this study. Governance thus becomes the mother issue in decentralisation since

all activities in the running of an education system must be guided by certain policies and plans (Smith & Foster, 2002). For example, decisions about school organisation, curriculum and funding, while they may stand on their own, are all matters of governance, hence this study's focus is on the latter and more comprehensive category. In Zimbabwe, most education policies are made by central government. One such policy has been to decentralise the governance of education and by so doing involve local communities in school decision-making. Thus one would expect to see some education policy making and planning shifting to the school and cluster levels, through which governing bodies respond to their own local needs as they attempt to achieve national goals. This study investigated how stakeholders understood, experienced and responded to such shifts of authority in Chikanda cluster. Like any major innovation, decentralisation must be financed, thus, decisions about funding become crucial. The next section addresses this issue.

2.6.2 Decisions about funding

As has already been reported in the last two chapters, much of the debate about decentralisation in education focuses on issues of funding, in particular, who determines the budget and how it is spent (Abu-Duhou, 1999; Bullock & Thomas, 1997; McGinn & Welsh, 1999; National Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002). To illustrate, in South Africa, a critical part of the legacy of apartheid is the huge disparity in the financial resources available to schools formerly serving different racial groups (Smith & Foster, 2002). This explains why the country's education system is largely funded by the state. However, the legislative framework of the South African Schools Act

(Republic of South Africa, 1996) recognises the need for other players to assist in funding public education. As observed in the section on why countries are decentralising their education systems, most governments, especially in the developing world, have diminished public sector spending. This has prompted their search for alternative sources of funds. Thus, in effect, this has meant a top-down push for decentralisation of education, which grassroots communities tend to accept in the hope of acquiring greater ownership of schools.

Decentralising funding entails devolution of decisions about such important financial matters as: who decides about sources of funds, how much fees per pupil should be charged, the allocation or budgeting of funds and the actual spending (McGinn & Welsh, 1999; National Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002; Smith & Foster, 2002). In Zimbabwe, the government pays a per capita grant to all public schools every year. However, the spiralling inflation in the country since 1999 has eroded the value of this grant to schools. Schools have to rely on school fees and levies to fund building projects, book purchasing and procurement of other items. Thus, schools shoulder a financial burden. It is one thing to decentralise funding in policy statements, but it is another to ensure that those tasked with making decisions in this regard are equipped with the necessary resources and skills to carry this out. This study sought to explore, not only how the stakeholders in the cluster understood and experienced such responsibility, but also how the financial standings of their schools influence decentralised school governance.

2.6.3 Decisions about the curriculum

The mainstay of the school financing discourse is how teaching and learning may be enhanced. Therefore, decisions about the curriculum are an important candidate for decentralisation. According to McGinn and Welsh (1999), decentralising the curriculum entails devolving decisions about the subjects to be offered at a school, the content to be taught, the selection of textbooks, the language policy, instructional methods and evaluation of teachers, and so on. Caldwell and Spinks (1992) also see the curriculum, which they categorise under 'knowledge', as being among the decisions to be decentralised, and an important area for decentralising education. Although they report that in the South African context very little authority over decisions about the curriculum has been delegated to schools, Smith and Foster (2002) concur with Caldwell and Spinks. Smith and Foster continue that this raises one of the key issues in educational governance: determining who decides what is taught.

Emphasizing the importance of linking decentralisation and school clustering efforts to the curriculum, Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler (2002) iterate the growing consensus that teacher professional development yields the best results when it is long-term, school-based, and collaborative, actively involving all teachers, and linked to the curriculum. They rightly argue further that in order to achieve ongoing professional development that reaches all teachers, programmes must be more localised. They must be facilitated locally and use, as a matter of crucial importance, teachers' own knowledge of their practice and understanding of the realities in their classrooms and schools.

The current Zimbabwean scenario regarding the curriculum is that most major decisions are decided at national level, such as subjects to be taught, their content and the language policy. However, schools can make their own determination of matters such as instructional methods and textbooks. This study investigated the implications of this strong national control of the curriculum area on decentralised school governance.

2.6.4 Decisions about human resources

The decentralisation discourse can hardly be sustained without 'talk' of the human resources that implement the innovation. Literature suggests that this area is another candidate for decentralisation. According to McGinn and Welsh (1999), this area entails decisions about who determines the qualifications requirements, who hires and fires, who sets the pay scales and who determines pay increases and promotions. Another major issue about the human resources in an organisation relates to decisions about the professional growth of the employees (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; National Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002; Rideout & Ural, 1993). In the South African context, the school governing body makes recommendations regarding the employment of school-based educators (Smith & Foster, 2002). This suggests that the issue of human resources is an important area in the decentralisation debate.

In Zimbabwe, matters of teacher qualification, pay scales and increases are decided at national level. However, in the recruitment and appointment of teachers there is a blurring of responsibility. Interviews with relevant

stakeholders revealed that officially, schools are supposed to recommend potential candidates to the district office of education, which in turn can only make recommendations to the provincial office. However, in practice the latter office tends to hire without sufficient consultation of other stakeholders (see also Chapter Five). In the matter of dismissal or firing of employees, there is greater clarity: the Public Service Commission performs this function. For promotions, staff appraisal conducted at the school level, among other criteria, is used. Professional development of educators is conducted through the cluster system as well as via the district and provincial offices. How individual schools and the cluster under study are influencing decision-making in matters such as these was one of the areas of investigation in this study.

2.6.5 Decisions about school organisation

The decentralised human resource decision-making area, discussed above, can only operate within a certain organisational structure. Therefore, school organisation becomes another important area for decentralisation. School organisation encompasses matters of organisational structure (McGinn & Welsh, 1999), decisions related to the distribution or allocation of time (Abu-Duhou, 1999), and decisions about admission practices (Bullock & Thomas, 1997). School organisation may also include decisions about discipline and pupil promotion procedures. Thus organisational structure constitutes the frame within which decisions are made. Therefore decisions about such a frame need to be decentralised.

In Zimbabwe, school structure is decided nationally to the extent that public schools are almost identical in form (see Chapter One). This study focussed on stakeholders' experiences of the interface of this common organisational structure and decentralised school governance. The study contends that the government-prescribed structure has longevity and unlikely to change significantly in future. Although within this set up decentralised decision-making power could be more evenly distributed, it is not. Rather, it is monopolised by some stakeholders. This inhibits decentralisation.

With regard to discipline in Zimbabwean schools, there are national rules and regulations that govern the behaviour of stakeholders such as teachers and learners. For example, *Statutory Instrument 362* (Government of Zimbabwe. Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, 1998) restricts corporal punishment for pupils. In the rare cases where it is deemed necessary, the school head or his/her appointee must administer corporal punishment in the presence of a witness and keep a record of such instances. To implement more serious disciplinary measures such as suspension or exclusion of a pupil, *Circular Minute P35* (Ministry of Education Sports and Culture. Provincial Education Director, 2000) requires a school to apply to the provincial education office. Regarding pupil admission, the *Education Act* (Government of Zimbabwe, 1996a) outlaws all forms of discrimination against any learner. Within the ambit of this broad legal framework, schools can design their own policies. Thus, stakeholders at the school level need to be informed about the laws governing the running of schools. In investigating decentralised school governance, this study examined stakeholders' views regarding their capacity

to make informed decisions, as well as factors that enabled and/or militated against such decision-making.

2.6.6 Decisions about school evaluation

Decision-making can only be adequately informed if a system regularly evaluates its own performance. Thus, decisions about school evaluation in general, and evaluation of staff performance in particular, are important to decentralise. Abu-Duhou (1999) advocates the school-based management model of running the affairs of schools. This entails schools developing capacities within themselves to be able to self-manage, as opposed to being reliant on external expertise and authority such as a school inspector might offer. This school of thought seems to be consistent with the notion of decentralised decision-making to the school level. Among other features, Abu-Duhou contends, school-based management requires that schools continually evaluate their own performance against set standards. In an empowered school, the staff will, among other things, be held accountable for the results of the school's programme (Harris, 2000). As pointed out earlier, such accountability is only possible in a situation where the school regularly evaluates its own performance. In the Zimbabwean context, the centralisation tendency in the system is likely to inhibit the self-management of schools. Thus, this study sought to investigate how stakeholders understood, experienced and tried to cope with these contradictions.

2.6.7 Decisions about external relations

To make informed governance decisions, schools also need to be in harmony with their external environments. According to Bush, Coleman and Glover (1993), one major task in a situation of increased school autonomy, is the management of external relations. External relations are to do with how an organisation interacts with other institutions and social actors outside it. In the case of schools, they need to relate with other schools, with other institutions of learning, with business and with society at large.

In Zimbabwe, though schools have always interacted with their external environments, the advent of the cluster system demands greater school-to-school cooperation. The shift towards greater self-financing requires more interaction with parents and communities as financiers. These changes call for increased capacity on the part of all stakeholders. As such, this study examined how stakeholders understood, experienced and responded to this increased need for external relations, particularly in the context of competition for learners, and how this impacts upon decentralised school governance.

2.7 Decentralisation efforts in selected countries

Literature (see, for example, Abu-Duhou, 1999; McGinn & Welsh, 1999; The World Bank Group, 2001) suggests that decentralisation of education is a global phenomenon. Thus, in order to understand the Zimbabwean scenario better, it is necessary to review international trends of how various countries, from both the 'developed' and the 'developing' 'worlds' of Europe, America, Asia and Africa, have gone about decentralising their education systems. It is

reported in many other countries such as Australia (Bush & Gamage, 2001), England and Wales (Bush & Gamage, 2001; Welton & Rashid, 1996), Indonesia (Education Development Centre, 2004), Malawi (Harber, Davies, & Dzimadzi, 2003), Mexico (AbiSamra, 2001; Juarez, 1999), Namibia (Dittmar, Mendelsohn, & Ward, 2002), Pakistan (The World Bank Group, 2001), Sweden (Lundahl, 2002) and the United States of America (Franklin, 1996).

This section summarises the decentralisation trends in Canada, Scotland, Chile, India, Tanzania and South Africa. These cases were selected on the basis of two major considerations: the diversity of perspectives on decentralisation of education they provide; and the wealth of implications for decentralised school governance in Zimbabwe in general, and in the cluster under study in particular. In drawing implications for Zimbabwe from the case studies, consciousness of the different contexts is exercised.

Smith, MacLennan and Bordonaro (1996, p.:85) discuss educational governance in Canada 'with particular reference to the shape and design of local governance structures in the education system'. They confine themselves to two provinces: Ontario and Quebec. The authors report that in the closing years of the twentieth century most of the policy talk on education in that country focused on the school as the key unit of analysis in promoting meaningful educational change. However, they also argue that schools are part of a wider education system, so change cannot focus solely on the school.

The authors report that the *Canadian Constitution Act* of 1987 granted provinces in Canada exclusive authority to make laws in relation to education, provided that such laws were not prejudicial to any denominational rights or privileges of Catholics or Protestants. The federal government is thus conspicuously absent in the Canadian educational system and this scenario is a subject of much debate in the country, with some people seeing it as a serious flaw in the country's educational system.

In Ontario, school-based committees have no statutory base and hence exercise little influence over school-level policy and decisions. In Quebec, parental participation at both the school board and institutional levels is statutory. Each school is required to constitute a school committee consisting of parents elected by their peers, which provides advice on a variety of educational matters. While the past governance debate in Canada was largely between the provincial government and local school boards, Smith, MacLennan and Bordonaro (1996) report that in more recent years, parents broadened the debate with their demands about choice of school and governance matters. Parental involvement has been found to be moving from mere consultative advisory roles to sharing power-based relationships with education professionals.

The Canadian situation raises a few points of relevance to this study. First, the school has become the key unit of analysis in most matters of education change. Instead of having decisions that directly affect the operations of the school being made entirely away from the school itself and by people not

directly affected by those decisions, the trend is towards devolved authority at the grassroots. As argued in this chapter and in Chapter One, this notion of devolving authority to the grassroots was a major driver of the decentralisation process in Zimbabwe. However, this study argues that while the trend to devolve decision-making authority to the lower tiers of the Zimbabwean education system is evident, how stakeholders understand, experience and respond to this trend, and thus influence its success or failure, still begs investigation. Therefore the study centred on these issues.

Second, while devolution processes are put in place, provincial centres still wield a lot of authority. This confirms the notion that emerged earlier in this chapter that the education system of a country can decentralise certain of its functions and still remain centralised in other functions. Thus, on the one hand, centralisation and decentralisation are not necessarily and always antagonistic to each other. On the other, centralised control tends towards domination and stifling decentralisation efforts. Thus, this study sought to ask: From the point of view of the various stakeholders, how then do these two forces play out in the cluster under study?

Third, decentralisation of school governance needs to have a statutory base for it to be influential to decision-making. In Ontario, where there is no such statutory provision, community participation in school decision-making is reported to be of little influence on policy. In the Zimbabwean context, where local governance of schools has been statutorily provided for, one would expect greater involvement in decision-making by all the stakeholders at

school and cluster levels. However, this is likely to depend on the power relationships between the higher and lower tiers of the system, as well as stakeholders' understandings and responses to the legal framework (see also Chapter Three). This study investigated how the legal framework impacted on decentralised school governance.

Fourth, the overall picture from the Canadian scenario concerns parents' increasing demand for involvement in school decision-making. Such demand for more involvement suggests that parents feel they have capacity to participate in such processes and they may constitute a strong enabler for successful decentralisation. This study was premised on the notion that in the Zimbabwean context in general and in the cluster under study in particular, parents' demand for involvement would be severely restricted by their lack of capacity to participate effectively. Thus the study explored factors that enable and/or inhibit decentralised school governance.

In Scotland, the 'Local Government... (Scotland Act) (1994) requires the new unitary district authorities being established in Scotland [...] to produce draft decentralization schemes for their areas...' (Mulgrew, 1996, p. 147). The new district councils that came into force in 1996 had more than 50 per cent of their finance and energies directed to education service. According to Mulgrew (1996), services had to be brought closer to the communities being served. Any educational service in the 1990s and beyond would fail if it were not in close and regular contact with local communities. Decentralisation thereby ensured that heads of services and establishments were held

accountable for the services they delivered. Thus, the quality of education would be: sensitive to local needs, of high standard, minimal in bureaucracy, flexible, empowering and enabling, innovative and supportive.

Mulgrew reports further, that after extensive consultation, the Education Department invited education authorities to bring forward, within set guidelines, proposals for administrative schemes of devolved management in primary, secondary and special schools in their areas. Under this devolved management, decisions to do with the day-to-day management of schools were taken at school level, by school heads in consultation with their school boards. Nevertheless, the education authorities retained a strategic, enabling and supportive role. The aim of such devolved management is to achieve greater flexibility and choice, to be able to respond quickly to changing needs, to bring control and responsibility to the school level, thus bringing real benefits to schools.

The Scottish experience is an example of strong political support for decentralisation of education (as discussed above) – a support that is crucial for the success of such an innovation. The Education Department in the country used a down-to-top approach by inviting the grassroots stakeholders to suggest devolved structures for the management of education. Such empowerment is very necessary if stakeholders are to be adequately motivated to participate in decision-making. This accounts for the present study's focus on questions such as: Do stakeholders at the school and cluster levels perceive higher authorities in the Zimbabwean education system as

playing a strategic, enabling and supportive role to decentralised school governance? Do these stakeholders feel capable of running a decentralised education system? Do they perceive the education system as being in close and regular contact with local communities?

Closer to Zimbabwe, Buckland and de Wee (1996) contend that in South Africa the debate about decentralisation of education has prevailed for a long time. Over the decades before the National Party came to power in 1948, a series of commissions investigated the issue of provincial versus national control of education. A number of these commissions, namely, the Jagger Commission of 1917, the Malherbe Commission of 1920, and the Nicol Commission of 1939, recommended decentralisation of education to local or district levels (Buckland & de Wee, 1996).

During the apartheid era (1948-94), the issue of local or district control of education was subsumed under the political rhetoric of 'own education' – a reference to racially segregated and differentiated schooling (Buckland & de Wee, 1996). However, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, the apartheid regime was beginning to relent and allow some decentralisation of education in schools serving white learners. In the first decade of the post-apartheid era, considerable attention was given to bringing education under the control of local communities. Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSAs) in many parts of the country provided the initial stimulus that eventually led to the school governance arrangements promulgated in the *South African Schools Act* of 1996 (Heystek & Lethoko,

2001; McPherson, 2000). The *South African Schools Act* establishes School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and assigns them authority over governance and management. In addition, the Act establishes Learner Representative Councils (LRCs). Through their representation on the School Governing Body, learner representatives have access to school policy and decision-making processes:

While much has been written about the powers and functions of SGBs and LRCs and their need for capacity building and training, their actual operation remains a mysterious 'black box'
(McPherson, 2000, p. 1).

The South African scenario, briefly described above, is very similar to that in Zimbabwe. The SGBs in South Africa serve similar purposes as the School Development Committees in Zimbabwe. In both countries, structures for decentralised school governance have been legislated and established, so that, arguably, there is political support for the innovation. However, as McPherson succinctly puts it, the operation of these grassroots governance structures, particularly how the stakeholders understand, experience and respond to them, is still an under-researched 'black box'. This study sought to investigate these issues.

Turning to Tanzania, Tikly (1996) states that real power and responsibility for almost all areas of education policy rest with the Tanzanian central government. Rural and urban councils have limited responsibility for schooling. They serve basically as conduits for funds. Tikly reports that districts have been unable to mobilize resources for education, despite having been empowered to levy a Universal Primary Education (UPE) contribution

from parents. However, Tikly notes that parents seem to be more willing to contribute directly to schools in their immediate areas than to be levied via councils. Where councils have proved efficient at re-allocating UPE funds to local schools, parents are reported to have been more willing to contribute. Parents also have a direct say in matters of school management through village councils, but these structures have no real decision-making powers. Some district councils have been relatively successful in mobilizing community resources for building secondary schools, a task which an individual village would be unable to achieve. The process has, however, been sporadic, thus negatively affecting issues of equity, with some districts attracting more funding than others.

The brief description of the Tanzanian scenario suggests that grassroots communities in that country lack capacity, by way of resources, to run the local education service. As a result, central government has resorted to centralising almost all decision-making relating to the running of schools. From this we see that Tanzania's central government plays a significant role in determining the nature of decentralisation possible in an education system (see also Chapter Three). Of particular note, however, is the willingness that seems to prevail among the villagers to participate in the education affairs of their local schools. With access to resources and capacity, such spirit would be one of the major enablers for successful decentralisation in Tanzania. For this reason this study examined what stakeholders in the cluster perceived as their roles as well as those of central government in the decentralisation process.

Hoffman (1996) reports that decentralisation in Chile has been continuous, but marked by two distinct periods. The first period, 1973-89, focussed on what the author refers to as 'financial decentralisation' (Hoffman, 1996). This was a period of military rule in the country. Policy and practice were concerned with institutional organisation and financial issues. Hoffman observes that the decentralisation process during this phase followed the top-down authoritarian approach.

The second phase, 1990-95, aimed at 'pedagogic decentralisation' (Hoffman, 1996). This second phase occurred after the country went back to democratic government after 17 years of authoritarian rule. The government believed that as a basic principle, decentralisation should, among other objectives, improve the quality and efficiency of education. Policies focussed on education processes, particularly inputs and results. The participation of teachers, parents and public opinion in general became crucial for decision-making and the education authorities became accountable to community interests.

Hoffman also reports that there was some controversy among role players on policies aimed at increasing the financial resources transferred to municipalities. There were two kinds of actors involved in these policies. On the one hand, the Ministry of Education channelled professional support and resources to teachers and classrooms, as well as creating new managerial capacities in municipalities and schools. On the other hand, the Ministries of the Interior and of Planning allocated additional resources in such a way as to give wrong signals to the system. The most inefficient municipalities received additional funding, while the most efficient did not. The decentralisation of

responsibilities to municipalities was not followed by the necessary training in management skills required among local staff for dealing with education matters. Community participation in municipal decision-making was weak in most cases. Also, schools lacked the autonomy needed to enable them to effectively manage affairs in a decentralised context.

The Chilean experience affirms the crucial role of politics in education. The democratic government brought in participatory decision-making in education, a shift from the hitherto top-down approach of the military government. However, it is not only macro politics that count. Even lower level district and village politics influence the way schools are governed, hence the need in the current study, to research the understandings, experiences and responses of stakeholders at such levels.

The Chilean scenario also implies that decentralising responsibilities without providing the necessary training, as has been noted earlier, seems counter-productive and possibly futile. The Chilean experience also reveals the importance of having clear role differentiation among government ministries, a scenario also observed in the Zimbabwean context (see Chapter One). Where roles are not clear, there could be duplication, for example in spending resources for the same purposes. There could also be reduced effectiveness and strained relations. As such, this study investigated stakeholders' perceptions of factors that enable and/or inhibit decentralised school governance in the cluster under study.

India is a union comprising twenty-five states (Singh, 1996). According to Singh (1996), within the Indian states there is generally a multi-level structure of administration: division, district, sub-district, block and village. The district has been the most important unit of administration of education. Elaborate structures have been set at district level to manage the school system. The thrust in the 1990s, Singh reports, was towards decentralised school management, with greater involvement of the local community. In pursuance of the policy to decentralise education, the Government of India funded the establishment of District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs) in each district. A major function of DIETs is to provide pre-service and in-service training on a regular basis to elementary school teachers, head teachers, education officers and functionaries of adult and non-formal education.

In addition, both national and state governments encouraged and supported the formation of Village Education Committees (VECs). These committees comprise representatives of the local community and teachers so as to improve the infrastructure and functioning of primary schools. In some cases VECs are involved in micro-planning and school-mapping exercises at the grassroots level. Singh (1996) reports also that the Lok Jumbish Project for *Basic Education for All* in the State of Rajasthan, has decentralisation of educational management as one of its prime objectives. This Project receives support from the Indian Government, the Swedish International Development Agency, and the Government of Rajasthan.

The Indian scenario described above is another case where administrative structures for implementing decentralisation, from central government to the village, seem to be in place. This affirms the importance of a formal structure, through which an innovation such as decentralised school governance, is to occur. The DIETs, as a training structure, also seem to be a sound support service, again emphasising the importance of knowledge and skills to enable people to cope with change. The DIETs of India perform similar functions as those of the Better Schools Programme of Zimbabwe (BSPZ). If such programmes are run well they are likely to grow the necessary capacity required by stakeholders to function effectively in decentralised contexts. However, as this study has posited about the BSPZ, many a time such programmes face severe operational difficulties, thereby failing to achieve their goals. In this light, this inquiry explored stakeholders' perceptions regarding the role of the Better Schools Programme as a capacity builder in the decentralisation process.

Although the preceding section has focused on Canada, Scotland, Tanzania, Chile, South Africa, and India, I made the point earlier that decentralisation of education has become a global phenomenon.

2.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to review literature on decentralisation of education. The chapter has examined reasons why education systems decentralise, issues of readiness for decentralisation, the nature and role of

the cluster system, decisions that are appropriate to decentralise, and decentralisation lessons from country case studies.

Literature suggests that improved educational financing, the quest for greater efficiency and effectiveness, and the desire for increased participatory decision-making are some of the key reasons why systems decentralise. It is important that stakeholders are prepared for decentralisation, by way of capacity building. The cluster system can go a long way towards such capacity building. Decisions about school organisation, the curriculum, human resources, funding, and school evaluation constitute some of the important candidates for decentralisation.

Overall, literature suggests that decentralisation succeeds in situations where higher offices of education systems play supportive and enabling roles regarding efforts by stakeholders at the lower tiers of the system such as schools, to implement the innovation. The thesis of this study is that such support is minimal, if not absent in the cluster under study. At the same time, the local stakeholders need to develop willingness and capacity to function effectively in a decentralised system. In the context of the present study, such willingness may prevail, though capacity is hard to come by. The interface between the lower and higher echelons of the education system in implementing change, as it manifests itself through the eye of the cluster, was at the centre of this study.

The next chapter discusses the main concepts and theories that framed this study.

CHAPTER THREE

Towards Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

Nothing will work unless you do.³

3.1 Introduction

In introducing the study, Chapter One argued that the decentralisation of education in Zimbabwe is an under-researched field. Thus, through a case study of one cluster of schools in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe, this study aimed at investigating the ways in which stakeholders understood, experienced and responded to decentralised school governance in that cluster. The study sought to understand the ways in which the various key stakeholders at the school and cluster levels interpreted and enacted the decentralisation policy governing Zimbabwean schools, as well as the ways they experienced the processes and products of such decentralisation.

To understand this, the first section of this chapter explores conceptual frameworks around which the inquiry revolved. These include the binary of centralisation and decentralisation; governance; and the notion of decentralised school governance (Buckland & Hofmeyr, 1993; Bush & Heystek, 2005; Grant Lewis & Motala, 2004; Lauglo, 1996; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; McGinn & Welsh, 1999; Murphy & Beck, 1995; Rondinelli, Nelson, & Cheema, 1987; Smith, Paquette, & Bordonaro, 1995). The second

³ Maya Angelou (cited in Brower & Balch, 2005, p. 39)

section of the chapter examines the theoretical frameworks that have informed my data collection and analysis for this inquiry. These include the locus of decentralised decision-making power, policy implementation, and educational change.

As a lens or framework for understanding the key issues and dilemmas that the schools in the cluster faced in their efforts to implement the decentralisation policy, the chapter examines the theory of where in the school decentralised decision-making power may be located (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Murphy & Beck, 1995). In the same vein, the chapter examines theories about the policy implementation process (Huberman & Miles, 1984; Jansen, 2001; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Murphy & Beck, 1995; Smyth & van der Vegt, 1993). In addition, because decentralised school governance is a shift from centralised control over decision-making, the study explored the various ways in which the Zimbabwean education system has introduced, implemented and managed this innovation. The ways in which the cluster has interpreted, enacted and managed the changes necessitated by the policy were also included in this exploration. For this endeavour, the theory of the nature and context of educational change (Beare, Caldwell, & Millikan, 1992; Bennett, Crawford, & Riches, 1992; Fullan, 1992) is utilised. The study sought to illuminate the various factors influencing the implementation of the new policy, particularly the extent and ways in which these facilitate or inhibit the success of the innovation in the cluster under study.

3.2 Conceptual frameworks

As stated above, the mandate to decentralise school governance in the Zimbabwean education system meant a shift from a centralised system of governance. For this shift to occur, stakeholders needed to understand what it is they were changing from, as well as what it is they were changing to. To begin this discussion, the various conceptualisations of school governance are discussed in the section below.

3.2.1 Conceptualisations of school governance

This study focused on school governance, particularly the ways in which the Zimbabwean government has sought to decentralise this to the school and cluster. What is school governance? Governance is generally understood to refer to the act or manner of governing, or the formal public system for controlling the behaviour of those to whom the governance is directed (Smith, Paquette, & Bordonaro, 1995). The term 'governance' has gained currency in international debates as part of the neo-liberal framework and the New Policy Agenda (Elmore, 1993; Grant Lewis & Motala, 2004; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992). This Agenda advocates that countries must exercise democracy and 'good' governance. It is a school of thought that claims that the meaning of the term 'good' is not contested, that there is consensus and universality about what is good. For example, some development 'gurus' refer to good governance as the 'missing link' to economic growth and economic reform in developing countries (Grant Lewis & Motala, 2004; Harber, 2002).

Furthermore, Stoker (1996) asserts that the neo-liberal conception of governance construes good governance to mean an efficient system in a market-oriented society. Such efficiency entails a government differentiating between what a government can and cannot provide efficiently, 'outsourcing' those functions it cannot perform efficiently, exercising fiscal restraint, identifying novel sources of funding and generally adopting a business-like approach in the running of its affairs. In this rationalisation process, central government sheds a significant portion of its responsibilities to local authorities. Obviously, such conceptions of governance can be problematic in developing contexts where local communities lack basic human and material resources for their efficient functioning.

Closer to Zimbabwe, in the South African context, McLennan (1997) perceives governance as a combination of political and institutional power to ensure effective management of resources for development. She argues that institutional power is embedded in the structures and practices of the institution in question, the rules and norms, which guide them, and the language and symbols through which social interaction occurs. To her, governance is thus the integrated management of the complex institutional relationships between people (the stakeholders), policy (the regulatory framework) and power (the distribution of authority to decide) in an attempt to achieve effective and efficient delivery. Grant Lewis and Motala (2004) concur with McLennan and argue that in South Africa, the post-1994 governance debate has centred on the formal articulation of rules, roles and responsibilities. Policies on governance focus on the structure and the

functions of stakeholders at the various levels of government, for example the composition, the powers, the reporting structures and the rules guiding their operations.

Maile (2002) cites the Auditor-General of South Africa, who defines governance as the exercising of power in the management of resources. This entails the nature and extent of authority, as well as the control and the incentives applied in deploying human and economic resources for the welfare of an organisation. The implication for governance structures therefore, is that power to make decisions must be spread across the entire organisation if 'good' governance is to prevail. This study sought to examine the spread of decision-making power within the schools and the cluster under study. The study posits that decision-making authority in the schools under study is not widely spread. School heads tend to monopolise decision-making authority at the school level and this has a negative impact on the decentralisation of school governance.

What emerges from these conceptualisations of governance is that it entails the exercising of authority within a given legal framework, and that the way a legal framework is configured and the way authority is subsequently exercised through that framework influence the levels of efficiency and effectiveness of the system in question. This is useful for understanding school governance in Zimbabwe in general and in this study in particular. For example, in Zimbabwe, structures in government ministries seem to portray the business-like approach to governance that Stoker (1996) described in that every

ministry operates through local, district, provincial and national offices. By so doing, central government is expected to retain the regulatory function, but shed significant responsibilities to grassroots authorities.

Based on this understanding of governance, one would expect, therefore, substantial decision-making power and authority to be exercised by local offices. However, this does not seem to be the case in practice. Scholars such as Whitty, Power and Halpin (1998), and de Clercq (2002) suggest that the top-down decision-making model, as opposed to the bottom-up, dominates. This is consistent with my observations as an educator and parent in the Zimbabwe education system. This study was motivated by my observation that there seems to be a deep-rooted lack of confidence, on the part of those in higher tiers of government, in the capacity of those in the lower ranks to make significant school governance decisions. Central government does not seem to believe that those at the lower levels of government can make important decisions about education.

Similarly, there seems to be a deep-rooted culture of compliance among local authorities. This is characterised by a focus on implementing ready-made decisions. The higher up the organisational ladder one goes, the more one finds 'ownership' of both regulatory and practical decision-making powers. Thus, there appears to be a deep chasm between theory and practice. The reason for the 'culture' of shedding off decision-making power and authority to lower ranks of government is not abundantly evident. Within this context, this study sought to examine stakeholders' experiences and understandings of

how this state of affairs would influence decentralised school governance efforts in the selected cluster. To do this, a good understanding of the concept of school governance was necessary.

Turning to school governance, there are several conceptualisations in the literature. Common among these is the notion that school governance comprises policy formulation and oversight of the implementation of such policies. According to Potgieter *et al.* (1997), school governance is an act of determining policy and rules by which a school is organised and controlled. It includes ensuring that the rules and policies are effectively carried out. While it captures the two pillars of what school governance entails: issues of formulating and implementing school policies, Potgieter *et al.*'s definition does not address an important issue for this study, namely, the role of stakeholders at various levels of the education system. Buckland and Hofmeyr (1993, p. 30) address this question, among other issues, when they say that educational governance is:

...not simply the system of administration and control of education in a country, but the whole process by which education policies are formulated, adopted, implemented and monitored. Governance is an issue not only at the national level, but also at every level of the system down to the individual school. Because it is centrally concerned with the distribution of power, it is often summed up to be the question: who decides?

Maile (2002) concurs, and argues that school governance is widely construed to involve the formulation and adoption of policy and management for the day-to-day delivery of education. According to Maile, while the professional staff of a school is expected to decide on day-to-day matters about the running of the school, all stakeholder groupings should be involved when policy matters are

decided. However, South African policymakers propose that even on day-to-day matters, all relevant stakeholders should have the right to contribute (Republic of South Africa. Department of Education, 1995). My experience as an educator in the Zimbabwean education system suggests that stakeholders at the school level are usually not fully involved in education policy formulation. This may be because parents, as stakeholders, do not see themselves as having a right to contribute to decisions regarding most of the day-to-day matters about the running of the school, particularly issues related to the curriculum. Thus, in this study I sought to explore how this state of affairs influenced these stakeholders' understandings of decentralised school governance, and the ways in which they implemented the relevant policies as a result of that understanding.

Another aspect of school governance not adequately captured by the conceptualisations cited so far is the role of the law of a country.

Encapsulating this feature, Smith, MacLennan and Bordonaro (1995) define educational governance as the formal system through which authority is exercised by government or by delegated bodies that represent organisational or individual stakeholders. To them, authority is the right, conferred by law, to decide about a particular matter in the education system. Thus, the legal framework of a given education system determines the nature of its approach to school governance. This inquiry sought to examine how the legal framework of the Zimbabwean education system enables and/or inhibits the decentralisation of school governance. The study posits that despite having put decentralisation structures in place, the country's educational law is more

inclined towards centralised than decentralised control. This opens the possibility for contradictions between the educational legal framework and practice to manifest. This argument matures as the thesis unfolds.

Moving on to the nature of school governance, Smith, MacLennan and Bordonaro (1995) report that in Canada, the debate on governance tends to centre on matters such as: the powers and duties of the provincial ministry of education; the sizes and structures of school boards; the funding of education; and the control of the curriculum. Although they argue that these debates often ignore the philosophical, educational and historical contexts within which change in school governance is being implemented, the content of the debates are important to this study, because they identify some of the key issues in school governance. To illustrate, in studying the nature of decentralised school governance in the cluster under study, it was pertinent to examine, among other things, the role of the equivalent of Canada's school boards: School Development Committees, because they are key stakeholders in the running of schools. This study also examines school financing and the curriculum as some of the crucial areas of decentralised decision-making.

The definitions of governance in general and school governance in particular, presented above, bear many commonalities. For example, in as much as good governance is widely considered to be the 'missing link' to economic growth and reform in developing countries, sound school governance can safely be argued to be at least one of the 'missing links' to school efficiency and effectiveness. In both cases, the goal is to achieve effective and efficient

functioning. School effectiveness can be broadly defined as the extent to which the school achieves its intended goals (Coleman, 2003b; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993b; Creemers & Reezigt, 1997; Harber & Davies, 1997; Harber & Muthukrishna, 2000; Jansen, 1995; Reynolds, Sammons, Stoll, Barber, & Hillman, 1996).

Summarising research literature on characteristics of effective schools, Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (1995) identify firm, purposeful and participative leadership, shared vision and goals, the maximisation of learning, and home-school partnership and parental involvement as some of the key factors. The nature of governance in a given school is likely to have a strong impact on whether or not these and related expectations are achieved. School efficiency, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which the institution is able to utilise minimal resources to achieve maximum goals (Coleman, 2003b; McGinn & Welsh, 1999; Thomas & Martin, 1996). This is crucial, given the perennial limitedness of the necessary resources to run education systems, particularly in the developing world. Thus, the achievement of school effectiveness and efficiency seem to be important features of sound school governance. However, school efficiency and effectiveness were beyond the scope of this study and, therefore, were not investigated.

From the neo-liberal perspective referred to above, the exercise of democracy is the mainstay of good governance at the macro level of society. Similarly, sound school governance entails the involvement of stakeholders, not only in deciding on day-to-day matters about the running of the school, but also in

determining policy matters. Therefore both governance in general, and school governance in particular, are centrally concerned with the distribution of power. As Buckland and Hofmeyr (1993) have rightly put it, these concepts are about who decides. These similarities in the conceptions of governance and school governance suggest that the macro perspective of governance in a given society will have a strong influence on governance at the micro levels, such as schools.

In this study, I use this analysis to examine how stakeholders perceive the role of central government in influencing the nature of decentralised school governance in the cluster. The thesis argues that central government, through its desire to control the education system, inhibits more than enables decentralisation (Smyth & van der Vegt, 1993; Wells, Canorchan, Slayton, Allen, & Vasudeva, 1998). The study also pursues the question of who decides beyond the two ends of the continuum: central government or the school, to who decides within the school and the cluster. As depicted in other sections of this chapter, and as expounded in one of the theoretical frameworks later in the chapter, this study asserts that it is quite possible, that decentralised decision-making power may find itself centralised within some stakeholders at the school level (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). As such, this study sought to investigate how the various stakeholders in the cluster under study experienced the location of decision-making power, and what they felt was the influence of the locus of power on decentralised school governance.

While most of the conceptualisations cited above construe governance as the formulation and adoption of policy and management for day-to-day delivery of the affairs of an institution, it appears that an understanding of the forces driving the regulatory frameworks is also necessary for a deeper understanding of governance. Forces identified earlier, such as shrinking government resources, the need for quality and equality in education, and demands for greater accountability, are quite consistent with those forces (discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two) that gave rise to the policy of decentralised school governance in Zimbabwe.

To illustrate, in the Zimbabwean situation, there is an apparent lack of involvement of stakeholders such as parents and teachers in policy formulation. On the one hand, pressures such as shrinking government resources to finance education seem to have 'forced' government to take the decentralisation route. On the other, through top-down decision-making approaches, government seems to have persuaded stakeholders at the lower levels, not only to participate in implementing the policy, but also to assume ownership of it. Obviously, taking ownership also entails taking away from government some or most of the burden of resourcing education. Poorly resourced local authorities are likely to 'cave in' under the weight of this responsibility. Thus, this study sought to examine how, through the 'eye' of the various stakeholders, this apparent 'forced' decentralisation trend, and the contextual realities of the cluster and individual schools impacted on the implementation of decentralised school governance.

Chapter One described the Zimbabwean government's paradigm shift from an education system wholly funded by government to one characterised by cost sharing and cost cutting. However, government does not seem to have shed any significant decision-making powers regarding the running of schools. Of particular significance to this study is the apparent suggestion that decentralised school governance in Zimbabwe will depend, to a significant extent, on the role and influence of central government. Therefore, the centre-periphery theory (Rojas, 1989) seems an appropriate explanation for the Zimbabwean scenario. Rojas reports that Prebisch, Pinto, and others hatched this theory in the early 1950s to explain the economic plight in which Latin American countries were trapped. The centre referred to the industrialised countries, while the periphery referred to all the rest outside the communist block. The theory suggested that the centre economically exploited (drained) the periphery. The only way out of underdevelopment, on the part of the periphery, was to 'dance to the tune' of the centre. The theory has since evolved with time to include central governments, their capitals, and any other entity as the centre, with control over grassroots communities (i.e. at the periphery).

The argument, in this case, is that the centre tends to dictate the nature and pace of change on the periphery. This study uses this analysis to develop an understanding of the degree to which the centre (government) controls the periphery (the cluster and individual schools) over decentralised school governance, as well as the impact of such control on school governance in the cluster under study. The centre-periphery theory is quite similar to the

policy implementation dilemmas theory discussed later in this chapter, in which the tension between centralised and decentralised control manifests itself in attempts at policy implementation.

Educational financing was, however, not the only push factor. The need to improve the quality of education was another. Thus one can safely conclude that school governance in Zimbabwe today is also driven by the neo-liberal school of thought, where efficiency and effectiveness are key motivating factors (Harber & Muthukrishna, 2000) hence the advent of the cluster system as a capacity-building intervention. Because quality education entails much more than sound school financing, this suggests that the investigation into stakeholders' understandings, experiences of, and responses to decentralised school governance cannot be restricted to that area.

This argument, in turn suggests that there are many issues around school governance. In an attempt to clearly describe what governance entails, Smith, Paquette and Bordonaro (1995) identify five key questions for assessing school governance, four of which I find pertinent to this study. The questions pertain to the division of power provided for in the laws of a country, the delegation of authority, roles of government and the delegated body, and accountability. While these questions can be asked of any education system, the legal structure of the Zimbabwean education system, which, as argued earlier, seems to be anathema to successful decentralisation, renders them particularly relevant to understanding school governance in the cluster under

study. The next section develops this argument in the process of discussing each of the questions separately.

3.2.1.1 The legal division of power

The first question Smith, Paquette and Bordonaro (1995) ask points to the legal division of power: *What division of power, if any, respecting educational governance is provided for in the constitution?* This is an important question because school governance in any country can only be understood starting from the provisions of the laws of that country. Through the law, power relationships among stakeholders are clarified. To illustrate, in the Zimbabwean context, schools are categorised into two broad groups, government and non-government (see also Chapter One). The cluster of schools in the study belongs to the non-government category. These schools are established and run by responsible local authorities, the main ones being rural district councils and the local arm of the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works. The non-government schools are governed by School Development Committee (SDCs), which are installed and should be monitored by the responsible authority in question. In both categories of schools, teachers (school heads, deputies and classroom practitioners) are employed and supervised by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. Thus, as described in Chapter One, there is dual ownership of these schools. The implication for this study is that in trying to understand and explain school governance in the cluster under study, it is necessary to gain good grasp of the law within which the schools function.

The dual ownership is problematic in that two different authorities govern the two key stakeholder groupings in the decentralisation process: teachers and the SDC parent members. Central government, through the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, focuses on the professional (teaching-learning) side of schools, while school governance seems to largely fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works. However, the contradiction is that the latter ministry tends to view school governance as non-core business to its other functions – perhaps understandably. This is evidenced by its apparent near total absence from what happens in schools daily, judging from my experience as an educator and parent in the Zimbabwean education system. Thus, the insistence from government that parent representatives and teachers need to work together in school governance may not be forthcoming. As pointed out earlier, this scenario seems to suggest that the structure of an education system, such as the dual ownership of schools, is an important factor in understanding possibilities or impossibilities for change, such as decentralised school governance, an issue this study focuses on.

3.2.1.2 Delegation of authority

The second question the authors ask is about delegation of authority: *To which bodies (group or individual stakeholders) does the government delegate authority or confer voice and how are they structured?* To address this, in the Zimbabwean context, decentralised school governance can only be understood in relation to the way authority is spread to the different levels of the system. Central government runs education through the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. The ministry delegates authority to the

province, of which there are eight in Zimbabwe, to a provincial office of education. Each province is further divided into districts and each of these has a district office of education. Within a district there are one or two sub-offices. Depending on the issue, schools may report to the main or sub-district office. In addition, non-government schools also report to their responsible authorities, such as churches or rural district councils, as the case may be and again, depending on the issue at stake. Therefore, authority to govern non-government schools is officially bestowed on responsible authorities, which in each case are represented by the SDC, which body is dominated by parents. Thus, it is often said by stakeholders in the education system that school governance authority now lies in the hands of parents.

However, as argued earlier, in reality, parents are often not party to education policy-making. For example, the existing structures have no room for a direct link between the SDC and the education ministry. As a result, SDCs tend to rely on school heads with regard to topical issues around the running of schools. The general low levels of formal schooling, on the part of most parent members of SDCs, also compound the problem. Obviously, then, there is a huge gap between policy and practice as regards the location of school governance authority. While formal policy locates authority with parents, in practice, real decision-making remains in the hands of central government. Obviously, this does not augur well for successful decentralisation of school governance. The study investigates the ways in which the schools in the cluster under study understood and negotiated their way around these restrictions.

3.2.1.3 The roles of government and the delegated body

Smith, Paquette and Bordonaro's (1995) third question pertains to the roles of government and the delegated body: *What authority does the government retain and what authority or voice does each delegated body have with regard to the various domains of educational governance?* An understanding of what authority each key stakeholder enjoys is important if role conflict is to be minimised. A survey of literature (see Chapter Two) suggests that countries differ with regard to decisions on what to decentralise. However, among the decisions commonly decentralised are those pertaining to the curriculum, human resources, school organisation and financial resources.

In Zimbabwe, while stakeholders such as responsible authorities participate in deciding matters in these areas, central government retains a significant grip on decisions in each case. For example, with regard to hiring and firing of teaching staff, responsible authorities can only make recommendations to the Public Service Commission (the mother employer of all civil servants), in line with stipulated teacher-pupil ratios. However, they can employ additional staff at their own expense if they so decide. With regard to the charging of fees and levies, SDCs decide, but only within stipulated maximums. This seems to suggest that decentralisation of school governance can only be expected to occur within a given regulatory framework. What then seems to emerge is that the firmer and more inflexible the regulatory framework is, the less decentralisation one may expect and vice versa. This study investigated the ways in which stakeholders in the cluster under study negotiated these restrictions in their efforts to effectively run the schools in their care.

3.2.1.4 Accountability

The fourth question for Smith, Paquette and Bordonaro (1995) relates to accountability: *To whom and by what means is the government and each delegated body accountable for the authority or voice it has?* Accountability is important because it allows checks and balances of what goes on. As described above, in the hierarchy of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, each lower level is accountable to the next higher level. The hierarchical nature of such organisations is such that higher offices possess more power and authority than lower ones. Of particular relevance to this study is that being located at the lower end of the hierarchy, schools are likely to enjoy the least decision-making power and authority. Therefore, decentralisation tends to go 'against the grain'.

This study was premised on the understanding that devolution of school governance decision-making power can only succeed in a reciprocal relationship of central government, local government and schools, in which the former is willing to relinquish some of its power, and the latter (schools) are able to claim more power, as well use it to implement the decisions in question. This inquiry explored how stakeholders in the Zimbabwean education system (the two tiers of government) in general, and in the selected cluster in particular, engaged in these reciprocal power relations, and the impact of this relationship on decentralised school governance.

A related factor that might inhibit accountability in the Zimbabwe education system is the role of the School Development Committees. To illustrate,

parent members of a School Development Committee are accountable to parents of pupils at the school. They are also 'an arm' of the responsible local authority, by virtue of being answerable to this authority. However, the apparent lack of serious involvement in school governance issues on the part of rural district councils, and the absence of a legal connection between SDCs and the Education Ministry, both of which are alluded to earlier are likely to leave SDCs without the necessary support. In addition, given the general low levels of education among the rural parents in the country, SDCs need continuous training for them to be able to cope with school governance in general, and decentralised school governance in particular. From this understanding, this study posits that successful decentralisation of school governance is likely to depend on (among other factors) the key stakeholders' understandings (parents and educators) of it, as well as their capacity to implement it. In a situation where such capacity is inadequate, such as is seemingly so in the Zimbabwean context, unless there are concerted efforts to develop it, centralisation is likely to significantly overshadow efforts towards decentralisation.

3.2.2 Centralisation and decentralisation

Centralisation and decentralisation are the terms used most frequently and consistently in the debate about governance. All organisations, public and private, are 'governed', that is, they conform to decisions about purpose, structure, personnel, clients and resources (McGinn & Welsh, 1999).

However, authority to make decisions is assigned by a certain centre, to occupants of certain positions, such as a provincial education office or a

governing body. A 'centre' can be defined as a point that has the greatest possible distance from all boundaries, or a point denoting the central tendency in a distribution (Lauglo, 1996). The term 'centralisation' implies a concentration of something around a single point or centre and the concept of 'centralised authority' denotes the concentration of decision-making power in a central authority (Lauglo, 1996). An example of this is when, in education, the head office of a government ministry makes all the decisions, such as those pertaining to aims and objectives, organisational structure, curriculum, appointment of staff, and so on.

On the other hand, 'decentralisation' implies dispersal, in this case, of the decision-making power originally aggregated around a single point (Bush & Heystek, 2003). McGinn and Welsh (1999) use the pyramid as a metaphor to describe the dispersal of power in centralisation/decentralisation. They argue that in both the public and the private sector, large organisations tend to be hierarchical in structure. Decisions made at the top affect more people, and those made at the bottom affect fewer people. Through a centralised structure, uniform practice can be achieved in an organisation because those at the top of the hierarchy make the key decisions. Decentralisation, on the other hand, moves authority downward from the point of the pyramid towards the base. In the case of the Zimbabwean education system, authority has been moved down towards the individual school and the cluster.

The two concepts, centralisation and decentralisation are inextricable because they denote different degrees on a continuum (Buckland & Hofmeyr,

1993; Harber, Davies, & Dzimadzi, 2003; National Education Policy Investigation, 1992). Hence, I examine them together in this section. Winkler (1989, p. 4) offers a sound conceptualisation of the two as follows:

Centralisation-decentralisation can be viewed as a spectrum ranging from a unitary governmental system where the central government has most power or decision-making authority to a governmental system where local governments and community organisations exercise a large amount of power. The ultimate centralised system is one in which all decisions are made in the nation's capital...

From Winkler's argument above, there can be hardly such a thing as total decentralisation of all aspects of the administration of a system as this would result in something fragmented, with no centre, and therefore, not a 'system'. Thus, decentralisation refers to the degree and nature of the movement of authority away from the centre (Buckland & Hofmeyr, 1993).

Lauglo (1996) rightly argues that bureaucratic centralism (the ideology and practice of centralisation) is quite pervasive in organisations of many developing countries. One of the reasons Lauglo puts forward to account for this is the legacy of colonial rule, which has left structures that are not easy, if not impossible, to dismantle in a short period of time. Another reason Lauglo tends to concern nation-building imperatives in post-colonial states. For example, the need to distribute resources equitably for social and economic development has yielded a strong emphasis on central planning. It is self-evident that such imperatives are likely to be better served in a centralised rather than a decentralised system. The influence this has on the nature of decentralisation in Zimbabwe and in the selected cluster formed part of this investigation.

Although centralisation and decentralisation of education may appear to oppose each other, an investigation of international educational reform literature reveals that, in practice, most, if not all education systems, may have centralised and decentralised features simultaneously (Harber, Davies, & Dzimadzi, 2003; Karlsson, 1994). This observation seems quite accurate, given the hierarchical nature of most education systems. In concurrence with this view, Buckland and Hofmeyr (1993) argue that while the description of education systems as 'centralised' or 'decentralised' is important in theoretical analyses, in practice the characterisation is not clear-cut. Already four decades ago, Levy (1966) had observed that all societies have combinations of centralised and decentralised structures. For example, decisions about the core curriculum of an education system may be decided at national level while decisions about co-curricular matters may be decentralised to provinces, districts, school clusters or individual schools.

The question, therefore, is not simply whether a system should be centralised or decentralised, but which issues should be decided at the centre and which issues are more effectively decided at lower levels of the system. These issues are explored in greater detail in Chapter Two. Suffice it to say that the distribution of power *per se* becomes the key issue. This study investigated such distribution of power in a selected cluster of Zimbabwean schools. The study was premised on the notion that distributing decision-making power is desirable, and that there are credible criticisms against centralising it. These are briefly discussed below. The discussion of problems often levelled against centralisation is not to mean that centralisation is without its own merits.

3.2.2.1 Some criticisms against centralised control

Rondinelli *et al.* (1987) identifies four flaws in centralised control. Firstly, they argue that central governments tend to be concerned with macro-economic and political issues, particularly with the aim of maintaining their power base. Only secondarily are they concerned with the provision of services such as education. Secondly, they argue that central government ministries tend to see themselves as accountable to their bureaucratic superiors and thus are less responsive to the needs and demands of the masses. Thirdly, officials employed in central authorities tend to become more concerned with macro issues and neglect the less exciting minutiae of the unique problems faced at the grassroots of the system. Finally, people tend to see services provided by central government as a free public good to which they are entitled, and therefore for which they need not pay. Thus, contrary to the main intention of decentralised school governance, which is the active engagement of all stakeholders in responding to the needs and problems of schools, centralised control appears to alienate these same stakeholders and trivialise the unique challenges of their respective local conditions. Thus, centralised control is inconsistent with theories of educational micro-planning (Bray, 1987), which advocate some degree of decentralised decision-making for educational planning and the implementation of such plans so that the local conditions, as mentioned above, are addressed meaningfully.

Another criticism relates to Apple's (1982) argument that centralised control de-skills teachers by taking control from them and reducing them to mere operatives without decision-making powers. Rondinelli *et al.* (1990) argue that

centralised control can stifle creativity, resulting in conformity, uniformity and equal salaries in unequal conditions. Rogers (1984) and Buckland and Hofmeyr (1993) add that problems of poor communication and training, experienced in developing countries, can undermine the very control that centralisation is structured to achieve. This may result in *de facto* local autonomy for local officials, which in turn can promote inequalities – the problem usually advanced in defence of centralised control.

In the two preceding paragraphs I presented the argument that among the many ills of centralised decision-making are its inability to cater for local conditions of an education system and that stakeholders in the grassroots of the organisation are relegated to mere implementers of ready-made decisions, as opposed to actively making those decisions. On this basis, decentralisation is the alternative. Thus, this study investigated stakeholders' understandings and experiences of decentralised school governance in their cluster, as well as what they perceived as some of the hindrances and/or enablers to such decentralisation.

Despite the preference given to the decentralisation alternative, it is noted that Lyons (1985, p. 95) gives a word of caution against decentralisation:

The fact that there are frequently political, administrative and technical obstacles to efficient educational planning and plan implementation at the centre is not an argument for decentralisation since the factors which militate against efficiency may be found to exist even more at the sub-national level.

Thus, education policymakers are cautioned against believing that by merely decentralising their education systems, their intended goals would be

achieved. This reinforces the argument made in Chapter One, that decentralisation is, in itself, problematic to implement. Hence, this study's focus is on how those in the cluster who are tasked to practise this innovation understood and experienced it. Notwithstanding Lyons' caveat, there are still noteworthy benefits of decentralised control. Literature (for example, Bordia, 1983; Weiler, 1990; Bullock and Thomas, 1997) identify three kinds of rationales for decentralisation, namely administrative, political and ideological. The next section briefly analyses the debates around each of these.

3.2.2.2 Some benefits of decentralised control

Firstly, the administrative rationale for decentralised control tends to focus on structural characteristics of organisations. It attacks the cumbersome and slow nature of centralised governance. Instead, it cherishes the dynamic and creative potential of decentralised control (Bordia, 1983; Education International, 1996). Drawing on this understanding, as stated earlier in this chapter, this study is premised on the notion that the way an education system is structured will have an impact on its possibilities for decentralisation. The more rigid the structure, the less possible decentralisation is likely to be. This view is explored and explained further in the theoretical frameworks section of this chapter.

Secondly, the political rationale for decentralisation points to arguments for conflict management through redistributing power from central government to local authorities and individual institutions. By so doing, the governing party is strengthened at the local level. Weiler (1990) argues that in such a system, a government will obtain added credibility by being more decentralised and in

turn more sensitive to local dynamics. This thesis posits that while decentralisation is potentially more problematic to practise than centralisation, it is a more sensitive approach to local educational needs. As such, any serious attempt at developing and maintaining schools that work, and achieving effective teaching and learning in a decentralised system, needs to identify factors that facilitate and/or inhibit decentralisation of school governance. Thus, this study explored stakeholders' understandings and experiences of decentralisation, and the nature of personal, political and professional relationships resulting from such governance.

Thirdly, ideological arguments for decentralisation rest on the premise that local control is personally and politically liberating and fulfilling, and that such control avoids the alienation that is usually associated with large modern societies (see also Barberger, 1986; Bullock & Thomas, 1997; Harber, 2002). In this argument, decentralisation is seen as a way of addressing the 'lag' of rural communities, which have not been brought into the mainstream modern economy. In addition, decentralisation is construed as being able to equalise the opportunities of those in rural communities with those in urban areas. This study is premised on the notion that in a context in which stakeholders have the skill and resource capacities to make and implement decisions, decentralisation of school governance, however little, is empowering. Nevertheless, where such capacities do not exist, decentralisation might lead to the alienation of these stakeholders and yield a widening and deepening of rural-urban disparities. Such a situation is likely to prevail in the Zimbabwean

context. Hence, this study's focus is on stakeholders' experiences of decentralisation.

Arguably, decentralisation is one of the most important phenomena to have affected educational planning across the globe for many years. While decentralisation may not be the panacea to all problems posed by centralism, it is a logical way forward for many countries, including Zimbabwe. Questions about who should make decisions about public schooling and who should pay for it have become centres of protracted debates. This study focused itself on a system that has attempted to decentralise school governance decision-making and sought to investigate the ways in which stakeholders' understand and experience such attempts.

As stated earlier in this chapter, decentralisation is a complex concept as it covers a variety of sub-concepts, such as de-concentration, delegation and devolution (The World Bank Group, 2001). The sub-concepts are characterised by the varying extents to which responsibility and authority are located. For a sound understanding of the concept, it is necessary to examine the degrees of decentralisation and the attendant ways in which power moves. Apart from clarifying a key concept of this study, this helps to narrow the current discussion to the specific type of decentralisation at issue in this study.

3.2.2.3 Degrees of decentralisation

Decentralisation is often understood in terms of four degrees of transfer of authority: de-concentration, delegation, devolution and privatisation (Bray,

1987; Davies, 1990; Govinda, 1997; Rondinelli, Nelson, & Cheema, 1984; Winkler, 1989). First, de-concentration reforms spread central authority to other bodies in the organisation or system without transferring authority away from the centre. This leads to the establishment of units of the central authority at different levels in the country. For example, many national education systems have established offices in provincial and district capitals, thus reducing the concentration of authority in national capitals. De-concentration shifts authority for purposes of facilitating the implementation of policies and regulations, but not for formulating those policies and rules. Although decisions appear to be local and may be made at a local level, those who make them are directly responsible to the central authority and not the local population (Karlsson, McPherson, & Pampallis, 2001). While this arrangement may facilitate decision-making that considers local conditions, it tends to give greater control to the centre. Coombe (1996) refers to this type of power shift as geographical de-concentration. In practice therefore, de-concentrated authority remains centralised authority. This yielded several questions for this study: Do stakeholders experience the supposed decentralisation of school governance in the Zimbabwean education system merely as de-concentrated authority? Are decisions not only implemented, but also made at the school level? Within the school and the cluster, is decision-making evenly distributed among the various stakeholders?

Second, decentralisation can take the form of a delegation of authority. Delegated powers imply stronger local autonomy. Legally, however, power still rests with the central authority, which can withdraw it from its delegates at

any time. Power is only lent to delegates. Coombe (1996) rightly refers to delegation as a limited and revocable transfer of authority for a selected range of responsibilities by a senior official to a junior one. McGinn and Welsh (1999) observe that, in a similar way to de-concentration, some countries have delegated authority for public education to representatives of the Minister, and these are located in each of the provincial capitals. To illustrate, in Mexico, beginning in 1979, delegates were appointed by the national Minister, and were given authority over essential aspects of education. Nevertheless, those delegated with power were still responsible to the Minister.

Of relevance to this study is the fact that delegation is very 'visible' in the running of public education in Zimbabwe. For example, a school head reports to the district education officer, who in turn reports to the provincial education director. The latter is answerable to the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture who in turn, reports to the Minister. The Minister in turn reports to parliament, to cabinet and to the President of the country. Obviously, while delegation may be a good start towards decentralisation, it still entails and portrays little authority for those operating away from the top of the pyramid. Thus, this inquiry sought to investigate the intended shift of school governance decision-making power in the selected cluster of schools, beyond mere delegation.

Third, decentralisation can occur in the form of devolution, which refers to 'transferring by law more autonomy to locally constituted government'

(Coombe, 1996, p. 17) and the creation of autonomous and independent sub-national units of government (Paqueo & Lammert, 2000). The creation, through a statutory instrument, of School Development Committees by the Zimbabwe government, and the authority given to these bodies, as described in Chapter One, typifies devolution, at least theoretically. This study was premised on the notion that despite the creation of the SDC as a grassroots governing body, this structure is not only deprived of the due decision-making authority, it does not possess adequate capacity to implement decentralised governance. Thus the study investigated the ways in which the structure facilitated or hindered decentralisation in the cluster.

Fourth, decentralisation can occur in the form of complete privatisation of the schooling system. This is the transfer of entire authority and ownership to the private sector (Paqueo & Lammert, 2000; Rondinelli, Nelson, & Cheema, 1984). The Zimbabwean public schools' scenario does not seem to point at this sense of decentralisation. Therefore privatisation was not of particular interest in this thesis. This study sought to investigate stakeholders' experiences of school governance in the light of these different degrees of decentralisation.

3.3 Some theoretical frameworks

This study is located in three theoretical frameworks around issues of organisational theory and educational change. They are: the locus of decentralised decision-making power; policy implementation; and educational change theories. The sections below discuss these.

3.3.1 The locus of decentralised decision-making power

This study sought to investigate stakeholders' understandings, experiences of, and responses to, decentralised school governance in a cluster of schools in Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. In this regard, the thesis of the study is that while some amount of decision-making power has been devolved to the school level, it has not necessarily reached all the stakeholders in the school. To seek reasons for this, the study utilises Murphy and Beck's (1995) and Leithwood and Menzies' (1998) notion of where decentralised decision-making power is likely to be located for the school. I have come to refer to this as the theory of the locus of decentralised decision-making power (LDDP).

Although the name of this theory is my own composition, I draw the content from the ideas of the authors cited above. While the focus of the debate around this theory is on the locus of power in a school, the implications thereof provide a theoretical lens for addressing one of the major questions of this study: What are the factors enabling and/or hindering decentralised school governance in the cluster under study?

The basic tenet of the locus of decentralised decision-making power theory is that such power does not necessarily reach all the targeted stakeholders. As Murphy and Beck (1995) argue, decentralised authority may take at least three diverse forms, mostly distinguished by where the locus of decision-making power lies. A relevant example, which the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (2002) reports, is that in Rochester, New York State, school-based planning committees give teachers a dominant voice in

decision-making. By contrast, in Chicago, decentralisation aims to engage parents and community members, along with teachers and principals, as major decision-makers in school decision-making.

Leithwood and Menzies (1998) analyse each of these centres of decision-making power well. They assert that such power could lie in the hands of school administrators (the school leadership) and they refer to this as administrative control. Or such power could reside with the professionals (teachers), which they refer to as professional control. Alternatively, power could also rest in members of the community served by the school (the parents). They call this *community control*.

According to Leithwood and Menzies, *administrative control* is aimed at increasing accountability for the efficient expenditure of resources. The assumption is that such efficiency will eventually pay off for student learning. To realise this efficiency, school administrators are given authority over such key decision areas as budget, curriculum and personnel. To assist in accomplishing their goals, school administrators consult stakeholders such as teachers, parents and pupils. In this scenario, the school governing body is typically established to advise school administrators.

By contrast, *professional control* positions teachers in the decision-making 'driver's seat' (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). The purpose is to make better use of their knowledge in such key decision areas as budget, curriculum and in some cases, personnel. This location of decision-making power is informed

by the assumption that professionals closest to the learner have the most relevant knowledge for making such decisions (Hess Jr, 1991) and that full participation in the decision-making process will increase their commitment to implement and take forward such decisions (Exworthy & Halford, 1999; Hatcher, 1994). Such participatory democracy, allowing employees greater decision-making power, is presumed to also lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness in the system (Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker, 2002; Harber & Muthukrishna, 2000; Schlechty, 1991). This form of decentralised decision-making does not necessarily exclude other stakeholders, but teachers would have the largest proportion of members, and the biggest voice in the decision-making process.

The third form, *community control*, which aims at increasing accountability to parents and the community at large, is informed by the basic assumption that the curriculum of the school ought to directly reflect the values of the local community (Herman, 2004). Thus the power to make decisions about the curriculum, budget, and personnel should be in the hands of the parent/community constituents of the school. Therefore *community control* refers to school governance dominated by parents and community members. Leithwood and Menzies (1998) suggest that this is likely to result in the most change in schools. This requires that teachers and principals view the community as a significant player in school governance, and not simply as fundraising and building renovation consultants. Based on the legal framework, the composition of School Development Committees (SDCs) in Zimbabwe, as reported in Chapter One, suggests a community control

structure. Parents make up the majority of the SDC, where, out of a committee of nine, five are parents and the rest are the head of the school, the deputy head, a teacher at the school and a councillor appointed by the local authority.

At face value, community control seems to create fertile ground for decentralised school governance. However, my experience as an educator in the Zimbabwean system suggests that administrative control tends to dominate. In the school system, school heads are generally the custodians of almost all decisions that need to be made in their schools. They are the chief executives, as it were, of their institutions and are answerable to the district, provincial and national education offices, as well as the minister, for all matters at their schools. According to my experience with the Zimbabwean system of education, in practice, school heads tend to consult teachers or parents in important decision-making processes in their schools, as opposed to involving them in making decisions. School heads appear to adopt this approach as a reflection of how they are 'treated' by the higher tiers of the system to which they report: the top-down model of decision-making. Therefore, far from being in the driver's seat, teachers and parents tend to take the back seat in decision-making processes in schools. Thus the study investigated stakeholders' experiences in this regard.

This study was based on the premise that where decentralised authority succeeded in being filtering to the school level, there was a possibility it was being re-centralised, as it were, in the hands of school heads. In such a

scenario, a lack of involvement of other stakeholders in decisions that affect them would be an inhibiting factor to realise fully decentralised school governance. The study argues that for successful decentralisation of school governance, the ideal form of control is neither of the three separately, but rather a hybrid of the three, a model I have coined as the Community-Professional-Administrative Control (CPAC). The CPAC model is informed by my conviction that the three stakeholder groups: teachers, school managers, and parents are all crucial players in decentralised school governance and that their roles are inextricably inter-woven and inter-dependent. For decentralised school governance to succeed, all three groups have to contribute to decision-making in significant ways. Using this lens, this study investigated such interrelationships, if any, among teachers, school heads and parents, and their impact on decentralised school governance in the cluster under study.

To understand the implementation of decentralised school governance in the selected cluster, it is necessary to examine the process as well as the dilemmas that impact on it. Thus, the next lens or framework used in this study is the policy implementation process (Fullan, 1990; , 1993; Glatter, 1988; Harris, 2000; Jansen, 2001; Smyth & van der Vegt, 1993).

3.3.2 The policy implementation dilemmas theory

In aiming to understand decentralised school governance in the cluster, I sought to investigate, among other issues, factors that enable and/or inhibit such decentralisation, and how stakeholders respond to this innovation.

Drawing on the ideas of Huberman and Miles (1984), Jansen (2001), Fullan (2003), and Smyth and van der Vegt (1993) to understand the factors that might enable and/or inhibit decentralised decision-making in the cluster under study, and how stakeholders might respond, the study utilises the Policy Implementation Dilemmas Theory (PIDT). In this section, while the focus lies on understanding factors inhibiting or enabling decentralised school governance and how stakeholders might respond to decentralisation, the theory also has implications for the capacity of stakeholders to function effectively in a decentralised system of school governance.

The Policy Implementation Dilemmas Theory is informed by what available literature suggests are dilemmas in policy implementation. To illustrate, Jansen (2001) argues that in post-colonial states, the lack of fit between education policy and practice is usually explained in terms of a lack of resources, legacy of inequality and dearth of capacity to translate vision into reality. Jansen argues that the problem of fit is a powerful view that is difficult to refute because (among other reasons) it assumes a simple linear logic between policy and practice, that is, policy moves logically and naturally from intention to implementation, and yet this is not the case. Concomitant with Jansen's (2001) challenge to this view of policy as something devoid of politics, of power and of competing interests and conflicting struggles, this thesis argues that efforts to implement policies, such as decentralisation of school governance, are often faced with serious dilemmas, which threaten these policies' survival. In the Zimbabwean context, the dilemma involves the political mandate to decentralise school governance on the one hand, and the

tendency to hold on to power by operatives in the higher tiers of the ministry on the other. In addition, while at the lower tier individual schools may desire increased local autonomy, such decentralisation may be disabled by the apparent tendency among the higher tiers of the education system (i.e. the provincial and national levels), towards centralising control.

In articulating this thesis, the study adopts Smyth and van der Vegt's (1993) argument that efforts to implement policy, by their nature, unsettle the existing power and influence pattern in an organisation. The authors identify four pressures that yield this unsettling and two derivative dilemmas. First, Smyth and van der Vegt argue that policy implementation exerts pressure on the organisation or system for an increase in centralised decision-making. To illustrate the nature of implementation work, the authors contrast the initial discussions of a new idea (adopting a policy) with the concrete activities involved in putting it into practice (implementation). They argue that while the former is a largely 'holistic' activity, the latter is much more fragmented. During adoption, what stakeholders buy into is an overall perception of the new idea rather than specific concrete changes in working practice. For example, it may be easy to holistically adopt decentralised school governance as a policy, but putting this decision into practice, involving who must decide what, how such decisions impact on other stakeholders, and so on, is more complex and fraught.

Moreover, implementation, unlike adoption, does not involve everybody in the same task. Rather, individuals and groups pursue their own component of a

complex and unfamiliar assignment in dispersed locations throughout the organisation (Fullan, 2003). This fragmentation of assignments, which is characteristic of implementation work, renders the need for co-ordination. Without co-ordination, there is a high risk for disorganisation to occur, in which sub-systems follow different priorities, use different time-scales and/or produce incompatible outputs. The temptation therefore, in the case of decentralised school governance, is to strengthen centralised co-ordination, maybe by the head office or provincial offices of education. Such a process is contrary and inconsistent with the decentralisation spirit. An unplanned outcome of strengthening the centralised co-ordination may pose a threat to decentralisation efforts.

In the light of this analysis, this study examines the ways in which stakeholders in the schools understood the policy of decentralised school governance, and ways in which they enacted their understandings through the ways they implemented the various aspects of the policy. In effect, the study investigated whether the stakeholders in this study adopted and implemented the policy of decentralised school governance.

To examine the concrete experiences emerging from the implementation of the new policy (for example, decentralised school governance in Zimbabwean schools), it is necessary to explore the extent to which implementation efforts at various levels of the education system, as well as between schools and clusters, are co-ordinated. To illustrate, 'adopting is a 'there and then' activity (how will the program appear in the future?) whereas implementation is a

'here and now' set of activities (this is how the concept works in practice)' (Smyth and van der Vegt, 1993, p.117). Thus, through implementation, the realities of the change begin to take effect. Co-ordination is necessary to determine the connectedness of these direct experiences, how the new idea fits into or clashes with existing practices, what incentives and disincentives it contains, and so on. This implies some central control function, which can influence the collection of this information about the implementation.

In addition, in the process of attempting to implement decentralised school governance, officials in higher levels of the education system (i.e. in central government) would demand reports from schools regarding the implementation process, lest there ceases to exist a system whatsoever. On the one hand, the demand for accountability is understandable and consistent with the observation made earlier in this chapter that centralisation and decentralisation co-exist in most education systems. On the other, a paradox emerges when the policy to be implemented is decentralisation but the nature of policy implementation renders a push towards central control through the continual 'policing' of central government. Acknowledging this paradox, the National Central Regional Educational Laboratory (2002) contends that working against the trend toward decentralisation is a tendency to recentralise. It reports of a survey of some large districts in the United States of America conducted in 1988, which revealed that the percentage of urban districts that were decentralised had dropped from 60 to 31 percent. This suggests that there is a strong tension between centralisation forces on the one hand, and decentralisation ones on the other.

According to Olssen, Codd and O'Neill (2004), the tendency for central control portrays a model of power that, *inter alia*, flows from a centralised source, from top to bottom. These authors contend that, in contrast, Foucault's alternative conception maintains that power rises from the bottom upwards.

The questions that emerge for these competing views are:

- How is decentralised school governance understood, experienced and responded to in the cluster under study?
- How does the paradox described above influence decentralisation in the school cluster and stakeholders' understandings and experiences of, and responses to such forces?

This study examines these issues.

Implementing a new policy requires stakeholders to engage in what can be unsettling experiences, such as the assumption of new roles that require new skills. To this effect, Smyth and van der Vegt (1993) argue that support and encouragement may need to be provided in a co-ordinated fashion, which emphasises the normality of the difficulties being encountered. To illustrate, in a study of school improvement, Huberman and Miles (1984) report on a programme, which enlarged significantly, children's learning domain outside the confines of school. The programme increased children's autonomy, and consequently teachers had less control over their learners than they used to have. This resulted in teachers feeling uneasy and worried, and it unsettled established patterns of interaction with learners, particularly the authority pattern. Such disrupted patterns need to be attended to in a co-ordinated manner, lest they yield insecurity, mistrust and decreased self-esteem, which

impede the implementation process. The need to co-ordinate implementation activities generates centralisation tendencies in the organisation. Based on this understanding, this study posited that in the Zimbabwean context, the push to co-ordinate, and thus control the implementation of policy, would be strong from central government. This would become a major inhibiting factor against decentralised school governance in that, stakeholders at cluster and school levels would be accorded little independent decision-making power. The absence or diminution of decision-making power on the part of any stakeholder is likely to dampen the spirit of that person or group towards a given activity. Arguably, therefore, a lack of decision-making power is a major inhibiting factor to decentralisation, while enjoyment of such power is likely to be a significant enabler.

Given the pressure for more centralised co-ordination, as described above, Smyth and van der Vegt raise a second paradox: that implementation also induces pressures for local autonomy in decision-making. New policy ideas require some freedom to experiment, make mistakes, and temporarily depart from being controlled and led by daily routines and obligations. Thus, it is expected that implementation of a new policy would result in requests for more autonomy and discretionary power as stakeholders engage in the new behaviours associated with the new idea (Carrim, 2001; Fleisch, 2002; Sayed, 2001). In this context, if successfully and effectively implemented, decentralisation would enable autonomy and discretionary powers in the running of schools.

Given the demand for autonomy, the formal structure in the organisation, which, as described earlier, is likely to find itself pressing for a centralised approach, is required to intervene again, but this time in response to demands for an 'against the grain' type of control. Thus, it may be necessary to remove blockages, which would inhibit the progress of implementation. As such, implementation can be conceived of as giving local stakeholders the status of what Smyth and van der Vegt (1993) refer to as front-line implementers. This status allows stakeholders to experiment and give shape to the new idea and, in the process, re-design their own work. This immersing of local stakeholders in the concreteness of implementation work is likely to render acceptance and a strong sense of ownership over the idea, process and outcome. These are important prerequisites for integrating new ideas into the mainstream culture of an organisation.

This thesis postulates that in Zimbabwe, stakeholders at the front line of decentralised school governance i.e. parent governors, teachers and school heads, are keen to be immersed in the concreteness of implementing decentralisation. A sense of ownership of decisions on their part would be an enabling factor to decentralisation. However, for them to be effectively engaged in the process, particular knowledge and skills (such as about financial management and the curriculum), as well as resources, are necessary, and as stated earlier, it is unlikely that the parents in particular, but other stakeholders as well, possess these. The study aimed to investigate these issues.

The two opposing pressures for centralisation and decentralisation, described above, form one dilemma (centralisation OR decentralisation) in the implementation of decentralised school governance. This study asserts that in the Zimbabwean context, the pressure towards centralisation would be greater than that towards decentralisation the history of a highly centralised education system, as described in Chapter One, is such that this model would be deeply entrenched in the practices of those in the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture for example. This would be to the extent that they would not easily relinquish significant amounts of decision-making power to school and cluster levels. Therefore, this entrenched super-ordinate/subordinate relationship between central government and schools respectively, would be inhibitive to successful decentralisation of school governance. It would also militate against efforts to build capacity in stakeholders operating at the school and cluster levels, so that they can function effectively in a decentralised system.

Third, Smyth and van der Vegt argue that as the implementing organisation interrelates with its environment, there is pressure for the organisation to respond as a unified entity. Organisations have a niche in the environment, which, over time, becomes accepted as legitimate. In transacting with its environment, an organisation establishes its identity, that is, an image of what it looks like and what can be expected from it. A new policy, depending on how comprehensive it is, may put such an identity at stake. In that case, the organisation will have to engage in a self-redefinition process as well as renegotiate its position in the environment. In the case of an education policy,

the redefinition may need to be explained and justified to various stakeholders such as teachers, parents, communities, and learners, amongst others. To achieve this, the organisation must present itself as a unified and stable entity since it is the institution's identity, its 'licence to practice' (Fullan, 2001), that is at stake. This assumes that there is harmony in the organisation. For example, the assumption is that schools, district, regional and head offices of education work in harmony. However, this is not always the case, as is argued below.

The endorsement of the new idea or policy is not confined to approval and support from the environment. The organisation also needs resources from its environment (funds, training facilities, and so on). According to Smyth and van der Vegt (1993), in redefining its identity, the organisation faces basic issues of acquiring legitimacy, securing endorsement and mobilising resources. These three issues are crucial to the organisation's continued existence because they link it to the environment that supports it. Again, this is more likely to be achieved when the organisation behaves as a united front. However, there is a contrasting type of pressure.

Smyth and van der Vegt argue that the organisation faces pressure from the diverse responses (or disunity) to the incentives of the new policy among organisational members. New policies are evaluated not only with regard to their overall merits and demerits but also from the perspective of their effect on individuals and on the power of groups within the organisation. A new policy can 'change the script' in terms of behaviours that are valued. Policies

will thus be scrutinised for their potential to increase satisfaction, improve or worsen employment conditions, and so on. Questions such as these lead to a situation of polarisation as members relate to one another, particularly between employers and employees or high-ranking and low-ranking staff.

This suggests that politics and power games are at play inside every organisation. Politics and power games are about fighting for control and no stakeholder is likely to accept being controlled without contestation.

Therefore, organisations are characterised by disharmony and relations between groups within the organisation are bound to be tested and in tension. The redistribution of power may find some groups more or less powerful than in the past. Individuals may experience role conflict between loyalty to their profession or to their primary working group.

Organisations tend to behave according to the pluralist perspective, that is, they are composed of different, competing and conflicting interest groups. Therefore, implementation of a new policy may be destabilising to the existing balance among the stakeholders. It may create disequilibrium. As a result, stakeholders' behaviour might shift towards a disunited response to new policies. As such, the twin pressures of needing to present a united front on the one hand, and recognising partisan reactions on the other, present the implementation of policy with a second dilemma. In this regard, this study is premised on the notion that in the Zimbabwean context in general, and in Chikanda cluster in particular, schools would exhibit fewer characteristics of a united front, and more of disunity. One major reason for this would be the apparent uneven distribution of decision-making power, both within schools,

among schools, and between local and national government authorities. The tendency to want to retain power on the part of the latter, and the propensity to monopolise power on the part of school heads, would not only inhibit the decentralisation of school governance, it would also point to the nature and impact of power relationships within the schools. The question for the study was: Have schools in this cluster been able to transcend these and to develop school environments and cultures that are conducive to decentralisation?

The dilemmas of policy implementation just discussed suggest that for any innovation to take root in an organisation, the nature of that change, as well as the context in which it is to be implemented, must be clearly understood. Thus, the next section utilises the nature and context of Change Theory to examine ways in which schools might manage the implementation of the policy of decentralised school governance.

3.3.3 The nature and context of change theory

To seek explanations regarding the success or failure of the decentralisation of school governance in the cluster under study, I reviewed literature related to the nature and context of educational change. This was premised on the notion that the ways in which the organisation understands the nature of a policy as an innovation (for example, a policy such as decentralisation of school governance), and the context in which it is to be implemented, determine the success of the implementation of such a policy in practice (Bennett, Crawford, & Riches, 1992; Fullan, 1993). Thus, in order to understand the issues and dilemmas that the cluster under study faces in its

efforts to implement the decentralisation policy, an understanding of the nature of the change itself, as well as the context in which the innovation operates, is necessary. Utilising this framework, this chapter argues that the nature of decentralisation as an innovation, and the context in which this change is implemented (i.e. in the cluster), may contribute as inhibiting and enabling factors to the decentralisation process.

This argument has to be understood in the international context of educational change, as well as in the national context of Zimbabwe in particular. To illustrate, since the 1980s school and college management structures throughout the world have had to cope with responsibilities and expectations, which have been changing with increasing speed (Bennett, Crawford, & Riches, 1992; Wallace, 2002). One such change has been decentralisation. Many education systems have had to shift from centralised to decentralised approaches. Justifications for this paradigm shift were discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. It is important to note that decentralisation, like any other change, brings about uncertainty. Indeed, Bennett, Crawford and Riches (1992) remind us that uncertainty is almost all that those tasked to manage education can be certain of. Change means alteration from 'what was yesterday' to 'what it is today' and this is often, not only an uncomfortable process, but also a complex one. As such, it is necessary to examine the nature of change.

The literature on educational change suggests that innovations usually fail because of three factors associated with the nature of the change, namely:

- The innovation does not address the priority needs of the organisation;
- There is a lack of clarity or understanding of the innovation among stakeholders; and
- Stakeholders are not coping with the complexity of the change.

Firstly, with regard to the need for change, Fullan (1993) argues that many innovations are attempted without careful scrutiny of whether or not they address what are perceived to be priority needs in the organisation under question. Stakeholders, such as teachers, frequently do not see the need for the advocated change. Multi-faceted reforms such as decentralisation, which demand the involvement of various players, seem to require a great deal of effort to clarify the nature of the needs being addressed (David, 1989a). Thus, people involved must perceive that the need being addressed is important and that some progress is being made towards meeting the need.

Informed by my personal experience as a teacher in Zimbabwe, I posit that all major stakeholders in the selected cluster: parents, educators and school managers, perceive the need for shared decision-making on matters of school governance. Given the legislation empowering School Development Committees to govern schools, it is logical that achieving some level of shared decision-making among the governors would be a priority need for every school. Appreciating this need for power sharing, on the part of the stakeholders, would be an enabling factor to decentralised school governance. However, in practice, there seems to be a dearth of such power sharing. The absence of shared decision-making is, arguably, an inhibiting

factor to decentralisation. Thus, this study investigated this disjuncture between stakeholders' beliefs and their practice in the governance of schools in the cluster.

Fullan (1993) argues that a lack of clarity or understanding of the innovation is a perennial problem in the change process. Diffuse goals and unspecified ways of achieving these goals represent a major problem at the implementation stage. For example, curriculum guidelines have often suffered from having vague goals and not clearly specifying the means of implementation (Fullan, 1993; Glatter, Castle, Cooper, Evans, & Woods, 2005). However, in a number of cases, policies are deliberately stated in general terms in order to avoid conflict and promote wider acceptance and adoption. Also, it may not be possible to provide clarity in advance. Rather, it must be accomplished. This suggests that stakeholders need to engage in policy or change dialogue in order to understand such policies fully.

Through such engagement, various stakeholders' roles can be clarified. This study, therefore, investigated the extent to which the policy to decentralise school governance in Zimbabwe was clearly communicated and clarified to the various stakeholders, and the extent to which they understood their roles in it. For example, the functions of the School Development Committee, as the governing body tasked with spearheading this innovation, are, as depicted by Fullan above, stated in general terms: to advance the moral, cultural, physical and intellectual welfare of pupils at the school and to promote the welfare of the school (Government of Zimbabwe, 1992). The study argues that it is

highly possible that the generally low levels of formal education among rural parents in Zimbabwe could be such that they would have no capacity to effectively engage with policy in order to understand it better. This would, in turn, limit the extent of their participation in school governance. While educators may have such capacity, the centralisation tendency in the education system, discussed earlier, would inhibit such engagement.

Secondly, the complexity of the innovation or change might influence the extent to which it is successfully implemented (Fullan, 1992; Glatter, Castle, Cooper, Evans, & Woods, 2005; Senge, 1990). Complexity refers to the extent and depth of change required of those responsible for implementing it. What do the stakeholders and their institution need to change in order to accommodate the new policy or innovation? As such, change can be examined in terms of difficulty, skills required, the extent of alterations in beliefs, and so on. While simple changes may be easier to carry out, they may not make much difference. This study postulates that because decentralised school governance means that school governors assume decision-making responsibility beyond the mere charging of fees and levies, to areas such as the curriculum, human resources and school organisation, it is complex in nature and requires more from stakeholders. Complex changes promise to achieve more, but they also demand greater effort and capacity, and failure in achieving them takes a greater toll.

My experience in the Zimbabwean education system suggests that most parents, in general, and parent school governors, in particular, find the

substantial changes in the way schools are run to be complex. This is because most parents have limited literacy and formal educational experience, and policies are communicated in English, a language foreign to them. In addition, school heads and teachers generally view parents as ill-informed and ill-equipped to cope with most school governance issues. Furthermore, teachers suffer from work overloading in their day-to-day activities in the classroom and schoolyard. Adding on the requirement to learn and implement a new policy, compounds their professional roles and responsibilities. Therefore, in this context, not only would stakeholders face difficulties coping with the complexity of decentralised school governance, but entrenched attitudes would also inhibit easy implementation.

Thirdly, educational change often fails because of the poor fit between the innovation and the organisation in which the change is to be implemented (Fullan, 1992; Wallace, 2002). Fullan identifies the local authority of education, the community, the principal and the teacher, as some of the crucial contextual factors that influence the fit between the innovation and the organisation. In the context of the present study, the local authority of education includes the responsible authorities, the district and the provincial education offices. Fullan argues that most attempts at collective change in education seem to fail, and failure means frustration, wasted time, a sense of incompetence, a feeling of lack of support and disillusionment. A history of failure or success in innovation attempts on the part of a local authority is likely to have a similar impact on attempts at implementing a new change. People carry meanings from one experience to the next. The more the

stakeholders had negative experiences with previous implementation attempts, the more apathetic they will be about the next change regardless of the merits of the new idea (Fullan, 1992). Similarly, success begets success. Thus, education systems, their sub-systems, or even countries can develop a syndrome of incapacity or capacity for change. Reports from stakeholders in this study regarding the experience of Zimbabwe in 1992 are illustrative. Schools, in conjunction with their responsible authorities, were authorised to recruit their own teachers through committees comprising school staff and community members. However, widespread accusations and counter-accusations between schools, responsible authorities and higher tiers of education, about nepotism, incompetence, and assorted other irregularities in the recruitment process, were reported. As a result the practice was discontinued after only four months in operation. From that time, education authorities have seemed lethargic about empowering schools.

Following this theorisation of contextual responses to successful or failed change, this study argues that in Zimbabwe, the context in which decentralised school governance is implemented is one of, not only a lack of faith among those in higher levels of education, in the capacity of schools and their local authorities to make significant decisions, but also a deficit in will to build such capacity. Moreover, stakeholders operating at the school and cluster levels seem to have become accustomed to receiving directives from higher tiers of the system, to the extent that the culture of demanding and developing local autonomy is generally absent. This scenario is likely to negatively impact on attempts at decentralising school governance.

Educational change also often fails because of a lack of community support. In a study of the effectiveness of an external intervention to improve the quality of learning and teaching of mathematics, science, language, and cognitive skills in a primary school, Moletsane (2002) found that the lack of parental and community involvement in school activities was one of the context-related factors that negatively impacted on the implementation of the project. Hallinger (1997) rightly argues that a healthy sense of community is a prerequisite for developing the capacity for change among individuals, institutions, or societies. Without this sense of community spirit, individuals may lack the necessary courage to attempt change as well as the support needed to make their way through the frequently fraught process. Hallinger contends further that although many changes faced in educational institutions require the development of new knowledge and skills, it is spirit or will that is at the heart of any change process.

In the same vein, Fullan (1992) posits that community characteristics are an influential part of the context for change. Earlier, Corwin (1973) found that community support of the school is positively correlated with a school's innovativeness, while Gold and Miles (1981) report of failed innovations where communities did not like the change they saw in their schools. To this effect, Fullan (1992) suggests that the role of communities in school affairs is variable, ranging from apathy to active involvement. In Chapter Four of this thesis, I report of a very apathetic community at one of the schools studied. At one stage in the history of this particular school, parents stopped paying fees and levies because of the then headmaster's alleged misappropriation of

school funds. The apathy stagnated development projects at the school for some years, leading to a drastic fall in enrolments, as well as a negative image of the institution among neighbouring school communities and society in general. From this account, and from the available literature, one can conclude that both the community, and a sense of community, play a key role in influencing the implementation of change in a school. This study posits that the communities in the cluster under study would be sensitive stakeholders, easily influenced for or against activities at the school. Successful decentralised school governance would entail growing a delicate relationship between school and community. Thus, the study examines the nature of school-community relationships in the cluster, and how these impacted on stakeholders' understandings, experiences of and responses to decentralised school governance.

According to Fullan (1992), the principal or school leader is another significant part of the context of change. Research on innovation and school effectiveness suggests that the principal has a strong influence on the likelihood of change succeeding. For example, Berman and McLaughlin (1977) find that innovations that have the support of the principal are more likely to perform well. In such innovations, the principal's action serves to legitimate the change, support teachers psychologically and facilitate the necessary resources. This is understandable given that the principal is the person most likely to be in a position to shape institutional conditions for success, such as the development of shared goals, teamwork and monitoring mechanisms. Emphasising the importance of leadership in the context of

change, Leithwood (1996) rightly argues that from the global shift towards a redistribution of power and responsibility in educational institutions has led to the emergence of a decidedly new image of the ideal educational organisation. This fresh image is an organisation less in need of control and more in need of support and capacity. Such organisational needs are more likely to be served by practices associated with leadership than with administration alone. In distinguishing between the two concepts, Drucker (1995) argues that leadership places greater emphasis on figuring out the right things to be done and doing them well, rather than simply doing things right. Thus, leadership is proactive. This study asserts that school heads in the cluster under study have been subject to the centralisation tendency of the entire education system in Zimbabwe, as reported above. This discourages them from being proactive. Thus, they would tend to monopolise decision-making powers, thereby stifling decentralised school governance efforts. To reverse this state of affairs new capacity building efforts would be required, and resources for those efforts are not likely to be readily available. As such, this study investigated the role of principals in the cluster to influence how other stakeholders (such as teachers) understand, experience and respond to decentralised school governance.

Fullan (1992) views the role of the teacher as another crucial local factor of the context of change. Heystek and Lethoko (2001) rightly argue that teachers' motivation to perform well and their professionalism in the delivery of a high level performance are important if a culture of teaching and learning is to be enhanced. Depending on their previous experience, personality, and

stage of career, some teachers become self-actualised and are more likely to take action for implementing change than others (Fullan, 1992). Also, some schools have a much higher proportion of change-oriented teachers than others (Rosenholtz, 1989). While some of this may be attributed to recruitment and selection processes, it is also probable that school culture shapes an individual's psychological state for better or for worse. This seems to point to the importance of peer relationships at schools. Change entails learning something new, and interaction is the primary route for social learning. The need for collegiality, open communication, learning on the job, group success, trust and support cannot be over-emphasised. Working together has the potential of raising morale and enthusiasm, opening doors to experimentation and increased sense of self-worth (Cohen, 1988). In the current study, the cluster becomes one such avenue through which teachers can get support.

Thus, success in implementing change requires that schools move away from what Rosenholtz (1989) refers to as 'learning-impoverished' schools towards 'learning-enriched' schools. In the same vein, other scholars (see Christie and Potterton, cited in Moletsane, 2002) suggest that some schools, characterised by very adverse conditions, are able to find ways to improve their conditions. The success of educational innovations can be measured by their ability to transform such dysfunctional schools into *resilient* institutions. These are institutions that succeed regardless of the adverse conditions. Interventions (such as decentralised school governance) tend to fail where there are *non-resilient* schools that continuously succumb to adversity. The former (resilient)

institutions foster continuous improvement. Such schools adopt continuous learning on the part of everyone, as the instrument for improvement (Harber & Muthukrishna, 2000).

This study argues that due to a shortage of resources, lack of initiative, and the centralisation tendency alluded to earlier (among other factors), the cluster under study would be learning-impooverished and therefore non-resilient. There, the stakeholders in general, and teachers in particular, would be ill-equipped in terms of knowledge, skills and resources, to successfully implement decentralised school governance.

3.4 Conclusion

Through a case study of one cluster of schools in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe, this study aimed at investigating the ways in which stakeholders in one cluster of schools understood, implemented and managed the decentralisation of school governance, and also the ways they experienced the processes and products of such decentralisation. To understand this, this chapter has explored three conceptual frameworks that informed the inquiry, namely, centralisation/decentralisation, governance, and the notion of decentralised school governance. The chapter also examined three theoretical frameworks that informed data collection and analysis in this inquiry. First, the Locus of Decentralised Decision-making Power was used as a lens or frame for understanding the key issues that schools in the cluster faced in their efforts to implement the decentralisation policy. Second, the Policy Implementation Dilemmas Theory was used to explore the difficulties

schools in the cluster face in attempting to implement the decentralisation policy. Third, the nature and context of Change Theory was used to explore the ways in which the cluster has interpreted, enacted and managed the changes necessitated by the policy. The study sought to illuminate the various factors influencing the implementation of the new policy, particularly the extent to which, and ways in which, these facilitate or inhibit the success of the innovation in the cluster under study.

Informed by the theoretical frameworks presented above, three key propositions about decentralised school governance in the cluster under study emerge. The propositions are linked to the research questions of the study and are tentative (Bassey, 1999). They are to be probed with empirical evidence from the study and are amenable to further examination beyond the scope of the present investigation.

The first research question of the study is: How do the stakeholders in the cluster understand, experience and respond to decentralised school governance? This thesis proposes that stakeholders in the cluster have a limited understanding, and are restricted in their exercising of, decentralised school governance power. Such power is unevenly distributed among stakeholders, with administrative control dominating. The thesis further asserts that the apparent strong centralising tendency (Smyth & van der Vegt, 1993) among officials in the higher tiers of the Zimbabwean education system probably leaves stakeholders at the school level with little decision-making power. This assertion informed the nature of the questionnaire of this study,

which sought to establish, among other things, what decisions respondents perceived as having been decentralised to the school level, and those that were not. The inquiry posits a sub-proposition that the same centralising tendency yields a 'down-stream' effect on school leaders who, in turn, monopolise power at the expense of teachers and parents. This sub-proposition informed the study's data collection (observation, questionnaire, interviews and document analysis) and analysis approaches, which were then tailor-made to examine power relations among the stakeholders.

The second research question is: What are the stakeholders' views regarding their capacity to function effectively in a decentralised school governance system? To address this, the study proposes that stakeholders in the cluster under study feel incapable of functioning effectively in it due to their limited understanding of the nature and scope of decentralised school governance as an innovation, as well as having limited knowledge, skills and resources to implement it. To be effective, new ideas of any worth require in-depth understanding, and the development of skill and commitment to make them work (Fullan, 1993). As such, part of the study's data collection, particularly the interviews, focused on stakeholders' understanding of decentralisation and their capacity to function effectively in the same.

The third research question of the study is: What are their experiences and views of the factors that hinder and/or enable decentralised school governance in the cluster? To address this question, this thesis proposes that the devolution of school governance decision-making power can only succeed

in a reciprocal relationship between central government, local government and schools, in which the former is willing to relinquish some of its power, and the latter (schools) are able to claim more power, as well use it to implement the decisions in question. The nature and impact of this relationship on decentralised school governance in the Zimbabwean education system in general and in the selected cluster in particular, were investigated in this study.

The regulatory framework of the Zimbabwean education system, the locus of decision-making power, and the capacities among stakeholders constitute some of the key factors influencing the decentralisation of school governance. It is noted that the legal framework of education in Zimbabwe, in which stakeholders at the school level are empowered to govern schools, has built a sense of ownership on the part of these social actors, which translates into an enabler for decentralisation. However, the same framework is so centrist in character, that it leaves schools with little space for self-governance. The thesis also asserts that where decentralised decision-making power – no matter how little – is evenly spread among teachers (for professional control), school leaders (for administrative control) and parents (for community control) (Murphy & Beck, 1995), decentralisation is enabled. However, monopolisation of decision-making power in any one of the three locations (professionals, administrators or community) tends to stifle decentralisation. Therefore, this thesis proposes that the three stakeholder groups of teachers, school managers, and parents are all crucial players in decentralised school governance and that their roles are inextricably interwoven and

interdependent. For decentralised school governance to succeed, all three groups have to contribute in decision-making in significant ways. In a context in which stakeholders have the capacity in terms of skills and resources to make and implement decisions, decentralisation of school governance, however little, is empowering. However, where such capacity does not exist, decentralisation might lead to the alienation of these stakeholders, and to the widening and deepening of the rural-urban disparities – a situation that may prevail in the Zimbabwean context. As such, the study's data collection and analysis processes examined the influence on decentralised school governance, of the country's regulatory framework, the locus of decision-making power in the schools, and the nature of the required capacity.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Design and Methodology

To be persuasive, we must be believable.
To be believable, we must be credible.
To be credible, we must be truthful.⁴

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that frame the study. This chapter describes and explains the research design and methodology adopted for the study. First, the chapter commences with a brief explanation of why and how Chikanda cluster became the research site for this study. Second, I describe the processes I followed in order to gain entry into the research site. Third, the chapter describes the research design, broadly positioning the study in the qualitative research paradigm and specifically locating it in the multi-site case study design. Fourth, I identify and describe the respondents of the study. Fifth, the chapter explains the four chosen methods of data collection: interview, questionnaire, observation and document analysis. This is followed by a description of the data analysis procedures that I adopted. Lastly, the chapter folds with a brief discussion of some of the key limitations of the study and how the inquiry attempted to address them.

⁴ Edward R. Murrow (cited in Brower & Balch, 2005, p. 81)

4.2 Chikanda cluster: why and how?

The study aimed at understanding and explaining decentralised school governance in one cluster of schools. The cluster is located in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe. Convenience sampling (Bailey, 1982; Henning, with van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004) was used to select the province on the basis of the latter's accessibility to me as researcher. In turn, to select the district and the cluster of schools eventually studied, purposive sampling (Bailey, 1982) was used. In purposive sampling, the researcher uses his/her judgment about which respondents to choose, and selects only those who best meet the purposes of the study. The process was also informed by Patton's (1990) advice that the logic and strength behind purposive selection of information is that the sample should be information-rich. Informed by the need to make one's own judgment as well as the need to select an information-rich setting, I selected the district with the largest number of schools in the province, namely Gutu district. Thereafter, I requested the District Education Director (DED) to recommend one information-rich and accessible school cluster. The DED supervises all schools in the district, thus the researcher considered him to be well informed as well about the clusters.

In his recommending Chikanda as a cluster, the DED explained that it was one of the first clusters to have been formed in the district. Furthermore, some of the school heads from Chikanda cluster were key facilitators of this innovation in the entire district at the time when the cluster system was started. Therefore, according to the DED, the selected cluster would be a rich source of information.

In addition, my decision to utilise the DED's recommendation also served as a strategy to help gain entry into the schools.

4.3 Gaining entry

Bassey (1999) defines gaining access as entailing the processes of getting both official and social permission to conduct one's study. He elaborates that official permission is when the gate keepers (i.e. the authorities) in a given set up grant one the go-ahead to conduct research in the organisation, and social permission as when the respondent accords the researcher the necessary rapport to allow the investigation to proceed smoothly. Expanding on this definition, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) refer to the use of covert and overt approaches to gaining access. The former refers to concealing from stakeholders one's interest in the research process, while the latter refers to making one's interest known and seeking the cooperation of the gatekeepers as well as respondents. For this study, I used the overt approach to gaining entry.

To illustrate, there were a number of gatekeepers whose permission and cooperation I needed to seek. First, I submitted a letter of application for permission to the Provincial Director of Education (PDE) and permission was granted in writing (See Appendix One). Such permission was necessary because the PDE is the highest officer for education in the province, to whom all education officials and schools in the province report. In turn, schools and all other institutions (such as the District Office) under the jurisdiction of the PDE are required to demand evidence of the latter's written permission from

all those seeking to conduct research or other business in the district. Thus, second, I presented the PDE's letter of permission to the Gutu District Education Director (DED), the head of the education office in whose district I would conduct the study (See Appendix Two). The District Education Director is entitled to know everything that officially goes on in the schools under his/her jurisdiction and is accountable to the PDE. Third, permission from the respective schools was also sought (See Appendix Three). To obtain this, again the PED's letter of permission was presented to the respective schools in the Chikanda cluster. School heads require such letters of permission to protect themselves against censure from their superiors, as well as from possible litigation.

In addition to the official process described above, this study was also informed by the need for social permission: what Bogdan and Biklen (1992) refer to as courting one's potential subjects. The authors contend that the researcher's arrival on the scene with a research permission slip from the central office is likely to create some interest and/or disturbance. In other words one may have obtained official permission, yet still experience reluctance to participate on the part of respondents. Thus, the researcher needs to lay the groundwork for good rapport with those where he/she will be spending time, so as to be accepted as well as receive respondents' co-operation. Respondents need to be helped to feel that they had a hand in allowing the researcher in and when this is achieved, they will help the research process.

In order to gain such social entry, I first made appointments and visited each school, where I met each school head and two teachers per school. To 'court' them, I handed them a letter of invitation to participate in the study (See Appendix Four). I then engaged in informal discussions with a sizeable number of the proposed respondents about their perceptions regarding the running of schools 'today'. In these meetings, I made it known to them what my research intentions were and that the nature of the study demanded a broad understanding on my part, of the schools and their communities. As an educationist known to some of them, it was not difficult to engage them in current educational issues, including those directly to do with the study, such as educational financing and the employment of teachers. It emerged, through these discussions, that most of the respondents had a lot to share about educational practice and that they often did not have an audience for their ideas.

Secondly, I talked to the councillor of one ward, to which two of the five schools in the cluster belong, about his role in school governance. Other councillors were inaccessible. Thirdly, I had discussions with two chairpersons of School Development Committees for two of the schools in the cluster. These discussions were mainly about their role in school governance. At the end of these informal interviews, I was satisfied that the respondents were convinced that, although I was not a potential donor coming to address some of the many financial constraints they faced as schools, my intended study on decentralised school governance in the cluster was worthwhile. I learnt that in order to understand more of the activities in the cluster in relation to school

governance, it was necessary to examine the cluster system at two higher levels: the provincial and the district (See Chapter Five).

As the discussion indicates, data collection and analysis in this study were informed by a number of ethical considerations. These are discussed in the next section.

4.3.1 Ethical considerations

To be ethical is to conform to accepted professional practice (Bailey, 1982; de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2005; Henning, with van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). As indicated above, one such ethical consideration that guided this study was the ensuring of informed consent. Informed consent entails making the prospective respondent fully aware of the purpose of the study, its possible dangers and benefits (if any), and providing the credentials of the researcher, before they commit themselves to becoming a respondent. To ensure informed consent in answering the questionnaire, I wrote an introductory letter to the respondents (See Appendix Five). In the letter, I introduced myself, described the purpose of the study, and requested the respondent to genuinely answer all the questions. In addition, the letter gave the participants the choice to opt out of participating at any stage of the research without fear of reprisal. In the letter I also undertook to keep information obtained through the questionnaire in strict confidence, as well as to use the data for purposes of research only. The letter also invited the respondents to participate in subsequent interviews and requested their

consent. Additional verbal consent was sought in all cases in which interviews sessions were tape-recorded.

The second ethical consideration that informed this study was the right to privacy. While what constitutes invasion of privacy is obviously subjective (Henning, with van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004; Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991), it can be safely argued that questions that arouse feelings of anxiety or guilt in a respondent are an invasion of privacy. To ensure respondents' right to privacy, the questionnaire was delivered directly to the respondent, and I intended to collect responses from them personally, without a 'middle person'. However, in some cases, respondents, on their own volition put the questionnaire responses at one central place in the school for easier retrieval on my part. This was understandable, given that some respondents would be busy elsewhere when I came to collect their responses. Most interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, without anyone else present, thus ensuring privacy. In the case of group interviews, respondents consented to the process, and I encouraged and allowed them space to share confidential information with myself alone if they so wished.

The third ethical consideration was the need to protect respondents from harm. Protection from harm embraces both emotional and physical infliction of pain that a study may cause (Bailey, 1982; Christians, 2005). In this study, no physical harm was envisaged and occurred. To ensure no emotional harm, the strategies described above were also applied. In addition, the cluster and the schools are all identified and referred to in this thesis through

pseudonyms. However, with regard to the education officials and resource persons in the provincial and district offices, complete anonymity could not be guaranteed because of their positions. However, their letters of consent allowed them the opportunity to opt out if they so wished. Fortunately none of them chose to withdraw from the study.

In addition to these ethical considerations, the study was also informed by what Bogdan and Biklen (1992) refer to as the common sense and moral responsibility of a qualitative researcher. They advise that to learn about people, the researcher must treat respondents as people and in turn they will reveal their lives to him/her. In this study, I sought to follow this advice by allowing respondents to air their views as freely as possible without undue direction and re-direction. In addition, I showed my appreciation of their contributions. This entailed, in some cases, allowing respondents to air their views about issues of little or no relevance to the present study so long as I felt this made the respondent feel more respected.

4.4 Research design

This study is located in the broad category of qualitative research. Qualitative research is multi-mode in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Henning, with van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). Qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural setting. They attempt to make sense, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992). This study used the multi-mode approach (see also data collection methods in 4.6 below) to investigate the experiences of teachers, school heads, and school development committee members, the people most affected by and responsible for the implementation of decentralised school governance. Thus, the qualitative research approach was perceived as the most suitable for this type of inquiry.

Qualitative researchers employ the strategy of proceeding as if they know very little about the people and places they will visit. They attempt to mentally cleanse their preconceptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Design decisions are made throughout the study in keeping with this approach so that plans evolve as the researcher learns about the setting, the subjects and other sources of data through direct examination. However, there is need to enter the research setting with some idea of what to do. This study was informed by the approach just described. Thus, I proceeded with a flexible plan in which I had developed a structure of what to do in the field, while I left room for adjustment as events unfolded. The fieldwork was designed to collect data through the triangulation of a questionnaire, interviews, observations and document analyses. Details of what was pre-designed for each of these methods, and what emerged after entering the field are described in the data collection methods section of this chapter.

The multi-site case study design was adopted to investigate stakeholders' understandings, experiences and responses to decentralised school

governance in the cluster. A case study is a detailed examination of one setting, a single subject, a single depository of documents or one particular event (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). The case is a bounded system (Smith, 1987). The system is integrated through patterned behaviours, that is members of the system are expected to relate to one another in certain agreed upon and commonly understood ways in pursuit of common goals. The cluster selected for this study is a bounded system in the sense that member schools share the common goal of working together in trying to improve their effectiveness and they engage in staff development activities towards realising this goal. In this light, the cluster was safely viewed as one setting with multiple sites. Because the cluster is made up of a number of schools, each school was treated as a site, hence the multi-site case study. While the five schools were considered to be one case, the multi-site approach was applied to harness any features unique to individual schools and how these impacted on the functioning of the cluster. Overall, the focus of the study was to examine this one setting in detail in order to develop an in-depth understanding of school governance in the cluster. Therefore the case study design was seen as the most appropriate to achieve this goal.

A funnel represents the general design model for a case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Yin, 2003). The process begins at the wide end, at which stage the researcher explores and addresses broad issues around the topic and then proceeds down the funnel to more directed data collection and analysis. This study was informed by the design model of the funnel in the sense that the initial two weeks of visits to schools involved the collection of background

information about each site and the case (i.e. the cluster) as a whole. In the two weeks, each site was visited for two days, comprising five hours each day. During these preliminary visits, interviews and observations were targeted at gaining deeper understanding of the research setting, such as the socio-economic backgrounds of the schools and their communities, decision-making processes in the schools, history of the cluster, history of each school, and so on. Such preliminary work was necessary, not only as it would explain provisionally, and in general, school governance in the cluster at that time, but it was also a rapport-building process between myself as researcher, and my respondents as significant sources of data (Becker, 1989; Vidich & Lyman, 2005; Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991). As data collection progressed, greater focus was put on the study's research questions, such as the role of specific stakeholders in decentralised school governance, factors enabling and hindering decentralised school governance, and stakeholders' perceptions of their capacity to operate in a decentralised school governance system.

4.5 The respondents

In the cluster, data were sourced from all the five school heads, School Development Committee (SDC) members of all the five schools, one councillor, the cluster resource teacher, all teachers in the five schools and available ordinary parents. In all, the study generated data from a total of 80 respondents comprising 40 teachers, five school heads, 12 representatives of School Development Committees, four education officials, two RDC officials, two representatives of other clusters and 15 ordinary parents.

4.5.1 School heads

The school heads were selected to be respondents because they are the chief executives of schools. They link their schools with both the immediate and the wider communities of parents and education officials respectively. School heads are not instructional leaders, managers and governors only. They are also custodians of all other societal values the learner is expected to acquire. Therefore, they are at the centre of school governance. From the school heads, I wanted to enquire about such issues as the extent to which they felt empowered to make decisions, their understandings and experiences in involving other stakeholders in decision-making, the importance of participation in cluster activities, and factors enabling and inhibiting decentralised school governance in their schools and the cluster as a whole.

With regard to their academic qualifications, two of the five school heads were university graduates holding a bachelor degree. The other three were all studying for their first degrees. According to Ministry of Education officials interviewed, the minimum qualification for headship of a primary school is an 'Ordinary Level' pass of five subjects including English and Mathematics, a three or four-year Teachers' Diploma, and teaching experience. Thus, the qualifications of the school heads in the cluster were either standard or well above the minimum. In relation to teaching experience, all the school heads had taught for ten or more years. This denotes quite significant experience on their part. All the school heads in the cluster were males. While the gender dynamics of the cluster were not a focus of this study, it is possible that this

impacted on the ways in which the school heads related to other stakeholders in the school, as well as in the cluster.

4.5.2 Parents

First, the School Development Committee parent members were selected as another important constituency of respondents because as parent representatives, they mark the inclusivity of the democratisation of schools. School Development Committees are school governing bodies therefore this study about the decentralisation of school governance is bound to harness SDCs. However, SDCs have traditionally been appendages as opposed to full partners to school governance. This study sought to learn from SDCs: their experiences of partnerships in school governance and perceptions of their capacity to perform school governance responsibilities and function effectively in a decentralised system, particularly in the context of a cluster. Of these respondents, five were female and seven male.

Second, 15 ordinary parents (i.e. those not in the SDC) were also consulted in this study, five from each school, comprising three female and two male in each case. In all the five schools in the cluster, school heads reported that there were more female than male parents attending meetings of parents, hence the selection ratio. One explanation for this gender imbalance at meetings may be that more men are employed in urban centres and elsewhere and they leave their wives in the rural areas to run the families. Hearing from the ordinary parents was important because they do not always have a chance to express their views through their representatives, even

where they attend scheduled meetings. In some cases, because parents are often busy tending for their families, they do not attend parents' meetings. Also, because each learner presents unique challenges to both the school and the home, parents' perspectives of the role of the school are not always homogeneous. Thus, it was necessary to investigate views from different parents about school governance.

4.5.3 Provincial, district and cluster education officials

First, in Zimbabwe, as reported in Chapter One, the councillor of a ward in a rural area is an ex-officio member of each School Development Committee of every school in the ward. All the councillors in the cluster were male.

Councillors are officials of the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, which owns most of the rural schools in the country (as explained in Chapter One). In the cluster under study, this Ministry owned three of the five schools, although the schools are run by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. (The remaining two are church-owned schools.) This study sought to establish how enabling and/or disabling the presence of two ministries were to decentralised school governance. The original plan was to consult all three councillors (one per ward) for the wards in which the three schools were located, but two councillors were unavailable. Thus, only one councillor was interviewed in this study.

Second, the cluster resource teacher (who in this case was a male) is responsible for coordinating staff development activities in the cluster. As reported in Chapter One, clusters are the means through which the Better

Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ) attempts to develop capacity among stakeholders in schools. Literature reviewed in Chapter Two (for example, McGinn & Welsh, 1999) suggests that successful decentralisation of school governance depends on the capacity of stakeholders to implement it. This study investigated, among other things, perceptions of stakeholders regarding their capability to function effectively in a decentralised system of education. Thus it was necessary to consult the cluster resource teacher to determine the extent of capacity building occurring in the cluster. The original design was, in addition to the cluster resource teacher, to consult the chairperson of the cluster coordinating committee. However, at the time of data collection, he was transferred to another district and a new chairperson was yet to be elected.

Third, outside the cluster, data were obtained from seven respondents: the Deputy Provincial Director of Education, the former provincial co-ordinator of the Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ), the Gutu District Education Director, the Education Officer responsible for the Better Schools Programme at the district office, the Rural District Council Executive Officer responsible for Social Services and two school heads representing other clusters in the district. The Deputy Provincial Director of Education (male) was consulted in place of the Provincial Director, to provide insight into the implemented provincial policies that informed decentralisation of school governance, such as the hiring of teachers. Within broad national policy frameworks, provincial offices design their own implementation strategies. Originally, the plan was to consult the Provincial Director of Education, but

due to his tight work schedule, it was not possible. I requested the former provincial BSPZ co-ordinator (female) to participate in the study to provide an historical perspective of the intervention's capacity building efforts. The District Education Director (DED) was selected to respond in this study in order to provide a hands-on perspective of the policies guiding decentralisation of school governance. The district office is mandated to design its own implementation strategies within the broad framework of national and provincial education policies. Moreover, the functioning of clusters is likely to be influenced by the leadership at the district level, because schools report directly to the district office. Also, the district office of the Better Schools Programme levies individual member schools in the district in order to facilitate staff development in the district. Therefore the DED was a significant source of information to this study.

At the district office of education, there is an Education Officer (EO) responsible for, among other things, the Better Schools Programme. The District Resource Teacher (DRT), who coordinates the activities of cluster resource teachers, is accountable to the EO. Thus the EO was harnessed into this research to provide a district-wide perspective of staff development activities. Such a perspective was necessary to understand and explain activities in the selected cluster. The original data collection plan was to also consult the DRT, but at the time of data collection, he was on leave. At the district office, all the respondents described above were male.

The Executive Officer responsible for social services in the Rural District Council (RDC) (also male) was consulted to provide information about the role of Local Government in school governance. As described earlier in this chapter, and also in Chapter One, Rural District Councils are the legal owners of most schools in rural areas in the country. The RDC owns three of the schools in this study. Social services within the council include the establishment of schools and clinics.

Representatives of other clusters were consulted to provide some data for comparing the performances of clusters. Group dynamics within each cluster, such as work relationships, levels of creativity in generating resources, and so on, are likely to impact on the success or failure of a cluster. Such information was important to this study, as it would shed light on internal factors enabling or hindering decentralised school governance.

4.5.4 Teachers

Teachers were consulted because they are the 'engine' of all instructional programmes in schools. School governance efforts are, among other goals, intended to facilitate sound teaching and learning. Decentralisation and democratisation of school governance entails that teachers should be more involved in school decision-making, because such decisions directly affect their work. This study sought to know from teachers, their understanding of decentralised school governance, and their experiences of and responses to it.

Of the 40 teachers who responded, 10 (25 percent) of them held bachelor degree. Twenty (50 percent) were studying towards a first degree. The rest (25 percent) were standard qualified i.e. in having five subjects at 'Ordinary Level', plus a three or four-year teaching diploma. Thus, teachers in the cluster were well qualified educationally. With regard to teaching experience, nine (23 percent) teachers had 0-5 years experience, 11 (28 percent) had taught for 6-10 years, nine (23 percent) had taught for 11-15 years, and 11 (28 percent) had taught for 16 or more years. These statistics show an even spread of highly experienced and less experienced staff, which augers well for the cross-pollination of ideas in staff development activities as well as the day-to-day activities and governance of schools in the cluster. Of these teacher respondents, 19 (47.5 percent) were male and 21 (52.5 percent) were female. This denotes a fair balance between the sexes, unlike the single-sex scenario among the selected school heads.

The next section describes the methods of data collection.

4.6 Data collection methods

Qualitative researchers value the multi-method approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992). As indicated above, this approach enables the researcher to examine a phenomenon via a triangulation of data generated using various techniques and from diverse respondent perspectives. According to Brewer and Hunter (1989) qualitative research is inherently multi-method in focus. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) argue that qualitative research is usually based on data collection traditions such as

participant observations, unstructured interviews and document analysis. The value of the multi-method approach lies in the complementary nature of the data generated through diverse methods. The limitations in one particular method are counter-balanced by the strengths of another.

Thus, this study utilised a multi-method data collection approach involving individual and group interviews, a questionnaire, observation and document content analysis. As mentioned above, this use of several methods is often referred to as triangulation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2005). The term 'triangulation' originates from the field of land surveying in which surveyors used three points to locate the focal point at their intersection (Denzin, 1978). However, in the context of research, the notion has since developed to include more than three data collection methods. Denzin (1978) expands this to a typology of four basic types of triangulation namely data, investigator, theory and methodology. Data triangulation refers to the use of a variety of data sources, while investigator triangulation is the use of several researchers or evaluators in one study and theory triangulation refers to the adoption of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data. Methodology triangulation is the use of multiple data collection methods. This study applied theory, data and methodology triangulation.

As I reported in Chapter Three, the theoretical framework for the study draws on three different theories to collect and interpret data. These theories are the locus of decentralised decision-making power (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998;

Murphy & Beck, 1995); the policy implementation dilemmas theory (Smyth & van der Vegt, 1993); and the nature and context of change theory (Bennett, Crawford, & Riches, 1992; Fullan, 1993). This triangulation of these theories influenced my choice of the research design and methodologies. To illustrate, because decentralised decision-making power may be re-centralised at the grassroots level (the locus of decentralised decision-making power), it was necessary to invite all the main stakeholders to share their understandings, experiences and responses to decentralised school governance. This is consistent with the notion of data triangulation. Similarly, it was necessary to utilise the multi-mode data collection approach to cater for the various differences among the stakeholders. Thus, the choice of data collection methods in this study was informed by both the notion of triangulation and the traditional approaches used in qualitative research. The data collection process sought to address the following three research questions:

How do the stakeholders in the cluster understand, experience, and respond to decentralised school governance?

What are the stakeholders' views regarding their capacity to function effectively in a decentralised school governance system?

What are their experiences and views of the factors that hinder and enable decentralised school governance in the cluster?

4.6.1 Interviews

To address each of the three research questions above, this investigation utilised two types of interviews: the focus group interview and the personal or one-to-one interview. The study used unstructured and semi-structured interviews. Unstructured interviewing refers to the open-ended approach, which aims at understanding the complex behaviour of people without imposing any *a priori* categorisation that may limit respondents (Frey & Fontanna, 1991; Henning, with van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004; Yin, 2003). The semi-structured interview, by definition, provides a loose structure and leaves ample room for flexibility so that the researcher can probe and redirect responses. During the first encounters with respondents (in the case of those interviewed more than once), or during the beginning of the session (in the case of those interviewed only once), unstructured interviewing was adopted. Later in the session(s), some loose structure was provided. This was informed by Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) advice that different types of interviews can be employed at different stages of the same study.

To illustrate, Bogdan and Biklen give the example that at the beginning, the interviewer may allow a free flow process in order to get a general understanding of the wide range of perspectives on the topic. Thereafter, the researcher may increase structure to get comparable data across respondents. This approach would provide for the necessary flexibility as well as focus in data collection. Good interviews are those in which the respondents are at ease to talk freely about their points of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Yin, 2003). In order to allow this necessary easiness, most

interviews were held in the last half of the morning, after the pressures of daily chores had been absorbed somewhat. The interviewees themselves preferred these times.

Considering that reliance on the words and voices of the people being studied is a distinctive feature of qualitative research, and that tape recordings produce the most complete verbal transcripts (Christians, 2005; Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991), all interviews were tape-recorded on receipt of consent from all the respondents in question.

4.6.1.1 Focus group interviews

A focus group interview is a systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2005; Frey & Fontanna, 1991). The participants constitute a focus group in the sense that they bear something in common in relation to the study's questions. First, teachers are the implementers of most school governance decisions therefore they were a crucial source of information in this study. Because they were many and therefore difficult to harness through personal interviews, the use of the focus group method became an efficient technique to obtain their views as respondents in this study. Thus, in this study, focus group interviews were conducted with groups of teachers in each of the five schools in the cluster (See Appendix Six). In each school, one focus group of four teachers was created. Thus, a total of 20 teachers participated in five focus group interviews held over the duration of a semester. Each of these groups was interviewed three times for a period of about one hour each. My decision to interview

these groups more than once each was informed by the notion of the cumulative nature of qualitative data. Information in a qualitative interview project is cumulative in that each interview builds on the previous interview questions and leads to a new series of questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Second, this study contended that decentralised school governance was intended to involve the parent more in making decisions to do with their children's learning. Thus, both the ordinary and the SDC parents were significant stakeholders in the schools and the cluster. The theory of the nature and context of change (Fullan, 1993), discussed in Chapter Three, identifies the parent as an important contextual factor in implementing educational change, hence the inclusion of parents as respondents in this study. However, in the field I soon realised that parents would also be difficult to harness as individuals because they are dispersed. Therefore, I took the few opportunities when they were available together to conduct focus group interviews. Thus, focus groups of three ordinary parents in each school were established (See Appendix Seven). Because ordinary parents were not easily accessible, only one interview session of about 30 minutes per school was held.

The SDC parent members, as school governors, were an important source of information on decentralised school governance. As such, two one-hour interview sessions were held with each group of the SDC parent members in each of the five schools. The number of respondents differed from school to school, depending on their availability on those particular days. In all, 12 SDC

parent members in the whole semester were interviewed (See Appendix Eight).

Group interviews can be used for triangulation purposes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Henning, with van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). The researcher can also use them to generate insights that can be pursued later in individual interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In this study, the focus group interviews were used for both these purposes. For example, these interviews informed and guided some of the one-to-one interviews described below, particularly those held with the school heads that, by virtue of their positions in schools, were well placed to shed light on various issues of school governance.

4.6.1.2 Individual interviews

Again, to address each of the three research questions, personal or one-to-one interviews were held with each of the five school heads (See Appendix Nine). In addition, to understand the situation in which decentralised school governance was being implemented, I interviewed the cluster resource teacher, the ward councillor, the District Education Director (DED), the Education Officer (EO) responsible for the Better Schools Programme, the Rural District Council (RDC) Executive Officer responsible for social services, two representatives of other clusters in the district, the former Provincial coordinator for the Better Schools Programme, and the Deputy Provincial Education Director (See Appendix Ten).

Three cumulative interview sessions of about one hour each were held with each of the school heads. These interviews were conducted within a period of three weeks. This period was, to my assessment, short enough to allow continuity, but long enough to achieve data saturation (Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991). While the interview with the cluster resource teacher took about one hour, the teacher was also in the focus group interviews at his school. He also responded to the questionnaire. A one 30-minute session was held with the councillor. One session of about one hour each was conducted with each of the DED and the EO. One session of about 45 minutes each was held with the two representatives of other clusters in the district. I also held interviews lasting about 30 minutes each with the RDC officer and the former BSPZ coordinator.

4.6.2 The questionnaire

My utilisation of the questionnaire in this study was informed by a number of theoretical perspectives. First, the study proceeded with the basic understanding that respondents complete a questionnaire in the absence of the researcher (Bailey, 1982; Cohen & Manion, 1994; Yin, 2003). Therefore, it was necessary to invite and motivate the respondent to participate by way of a covering letter or introductory statement (See Appendix Five). I structured the letter in accordance with Bailey's (1982) advice that the covering letter is essentially a selling or public relations job. It should: identify the researcher; tell why the study is important and should be conducted; and assure the respondent that there are no right or wrong answers and that he or she will not be identified and that their answers will be treated confidentially. Another

implication is that the instrument must be as clearly worded as possible. Also, it is necessary to include instructions for the respondent. Such instructions may differ from section to section in the instrument. Frey and Fontana's (1991) warning that the spoken or written word has always a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully the researcher words the question, serves to reiterate the need to word questions in as clear a manner as possible.

Second, I was quite aware that wording the questions by itself is only part of the task. Careful thought must be given to the nature of the response expected. Thus, I varied the nature of questions in order to solicit varied responses accordingly. Bailey (1982) distinguishes between open-ended and closed-ended types of questions. The former type entails questions in which response categories are not specified. The latter type refers to questions in which the respondent selects one or more of the specific categories provided by the researcher. In the closed-ended questions, answers are standardised so they can be compared from respondent to respondent and are easier to code and analyse. In the open-ended, the respondent is allowed to offer details to elaborate and nuance their answer, the researcher can address complex issues, and more creativity and self-expression is possible in a respondent's answer. Because understanding human behaviour is the mainstay of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Schwandt, 2005), this inquiry employed more open-ended questions than closed-ended ones. Where a rating scale was given, respondents were given ample space to elaborate and explain their selected rating and express themselves.

Third, the order of questions was another important consideration in the construction of the questionnaire. This refers to the sequence with which questions are presented to the respondent. This study applied Bailey's (1982) rules for question order, which include starting with the less sensitive and closed-ended ones and ending with the more sensitive, complex and open-ended ones. This ordering puts the respondent at ease in the first instance, and allows the respondent time to warm up, as it were, to the topic of questionnaire. In this investigation, the former less sensitive and closed-ended questions covered requests for the respondent's biographical data, while the latter more complex, sensitive and open-ended questions included those to do with the extent to which teachers were involved in school decision-making. The latter questions were sensitive in that they touched on the styles of leadership that school heads practised, some of which could be autocratic and undesirable. If such questions are presented early in a questionnaire, the subject may respond to them adversely and refuse to continue to subsequent questions. This is because they may fear possible censure and victimisation if their responses about their superiors were to be disclosed. However, if these questions are met later, the information on all the non-sensitive questions already answered is secured, even if the respondent declines to answer the remaining ones.

In this study, however, adequate assurance about the confidentiality of their responses was given to all respondents through the introductory letter as well as verbally at the time of distributing questionnaire. Open-ended questions should also come later in the questionnaire because they generally require

more thought and writing. If these questions come early, they might be so taxing as to discourage the respondent from continuing to the end of the questionnaire.

Fourth, the need to pre-test one's instrument also informed the construction of the questionnaire. Pre-testing a data collection instrument entails administering the instrument to a few respondents so that its flaws can be identified and corrected (Bailey, 1982; Cohen & Manion, 1994; de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2005). The pre-test comprises the complete instrument and should be conducted in the same manner as it is planned eventually to use it in the field. In this study, the pre-test was conducted among five teachers in one school outside the selected cluster for this study. This strategy was informed by Bailey's (1982) argument that researchers need not be careful that the pre-test respondents have the exact characteristics of the respondents in the final study.

This study also adopted Bailey's plausible suggested instructions to pre-test respondents, which include that in addition to completing the questions, respondents are asked for their critical analysis of all aspects of the questionnaire. These aspects included question wording, question order, redundant questions, missing questions, inappropriate or confusing questions, insufficient space for answering open-ended questions and any other constituencies of the questionnaire that they found inadequate. While most of the pre-test respondents tended to report positively about the instrument, the way they answered some questions showed a misunderstanding of my

original thoughts. Thus, I revised some of the wordings of questions accordingly.

The one questionnaire in this study was administered among 50 of the 57 teachers in the cluster (See Appendix Eleven). The questionnaire was constructed to address all the three research questions of the study. The original aim was to reach all 57 teachers but, because of various other commitments on their part, seven teachers could not be reached. Out of the 50 teachers to whom I administered the questionnaire, 40 of them responded, making a response rate of 80 percent.

The questionnaire instrument was made up of 10 main questions, most of which were broken down into sub-items, making a total of 61 items. The questionnaire was divided into six sections (sections A-F). Section A requested background information of the respondent, namely, sex, post of responsibility (if any), teaching experience and length of service at the school. Respondents were asked to indicate their information by ticking in the appropriate box. Apart from warming up the respondent by requesting simple, factual and readily available information, the biographical data were also crucial to this study in other ways. For example, posts of responsibility and sex would provide some preliminary insight on the formal distribution of power within the school. The formal distribution of power would be a rough indicator of the extent of decentralised governance within the school. Teaching experience would indicate how long the respondent had been part of the decentralisation process. This exposure was likely to have influenced their

perceptions of the entire process. Similarly, the length of service at a particular school would influence the respondent's experiences in the cluster under study.

Section B concentrated on the decentralisation of decision-making authority to the school level. The respondent was asked to indicate the extent to which, in his/her opinion, authority to make decisions in given areas had been decentralised to the school level. Informed by available literature (for example, McGinn & Welsh, 1999), the questionnaire identified and investigated eight main areas of decision-making namely pupil admissions, school organisation, curriculum, monitoring of pupil progress, financial, human and material resources, and information. However, for purposes of greater focus only five areas are discussed in detail (see Chapter 6 for the full discussion). Sub-items under each of the main areas were also identified. Using a Likert-type scale ranging from zero (Not at all) to four (To a full extent), the instrument requested respondents to rate their perceptions of the extent of decentralisation to the school level, of decisions about each sub-item. Respondents indicated their ratings by ticking in the appropriate box. Respondents were also encouraged to add any comments they deemed necessary to substantiate and complement the rating of each item.

Section C sought information on teacher involvement in decision-making. Using the same response rating format and the same areas of decision-making described in Section B, the respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which, as teachers, they participated in the making of decisions

in those areas. This section was important to the study because it could not be assumed that when decision-making authority is decentralised to the school level, the teacher enjoys such authority necessarily. The notion that underpinned this assumption was that the school on its own is a bureaucracy (Bush, 2003a; Packwood, 1989). This notion is consistent with and was informed by the theory of the locus of decentralised decision-making power (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Murphy & Beck, 1995) as well as the centralisation tendency of organisations in the policy implementation dilemmas theory (Smyth & van der Vegt, 1993), as discussed in Chapter Three.

Section D sought respondents' views regarding the extent of success of the Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ) in building the capacity of stakeholders to function effectively in individual schools as well as in the cluster. Using the same rating scale as described for Sections B and C above, respondents were asked to rate each of the given objectives of the BSPZ in terms of how well they thought the objective was being achieved in the cluster. Similarly, respondents were also requested to make additional comments to substantiate their responses. As described in Chapter One, the BSPZ works through school clusters to develop capacity among teachers, school heads and SDCs to run schools. Thus the performance of the cluster under study could only be determined through the performance of the BSPZ. Factors enabling and hindering successful decentralised school governance would also emerge from responses in this section.

Section E sought to generate respondents' perceptions regarding barriers to decentralised school governance. This section posed only one open-ended question and provided ample space for respondents to report as many such barriers as they perceived.

The last section of the questionnaire, Section F, asked respondents in an open-ended format, to give their overall impressions about the effectiveness of the cluster system, as well as their perceptions of the impact of decentralised school governance on the running of schools.

At each school, I personally delivered the questionnaire to each respondent, at the end of an introductory session. I used the latter session to run through the questionnaire and explain any unclear issues, that is, in addition to the accompanying written instructions. I requested respondents to indicate when I could come back to collect the responses within a period of 10 days. I had promised to personally collect the completed scripts from each respondent, but in most cases, I found that they had all been collected and left with one teacher. This was done because some teachers would be away on other responsibilities at the time of my return. The questionnaires were entirely anonymous. However, responses from each school were kept separately until the final stages of data analysis.

4.6.3 Observation

In order to understand stakeholders' experiences of and responses to decentralised school governance, and to be able to triangulate findings with

their own responses, I undertook observations. Observation is the art of noting a phenomenon. It consists of the researcher gathering impressions about this phenomenon, through all his/her relevant human faculties (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Cohen & Manion, 1994; de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2005).

Specific theoretical bases informed the observation processes and procedures followed in this study. Scholars (for example, Bassey, 2005; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2005; Vidich & Lyman, 2005) suggest that there is a range of possible roles that observers can play. At one extreme is the completely external observer. In this role the researcher does not participate in activities within the setting being studied. He/she looks at the scene through a one-way mirror perspective. At the other end of the range of roles is the complete participation of the researcher, with little discernible difference distinguishing the observer's from the subject's behaviours. I adopted Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) advice that fieldworkers should assume a role in between these extremes. My observations also proceeded on the basis of these authors' approach whereby, during the initial stages of a study, the researcher remains somewhat detached from respondents and waits to see how relationships are unfolding. As the latter develop, the researcher begins to increase participation as necessary. At the later stages of fieldwork, it may be important once again for the researcher to reduce participation. Over-participation can lead to 'going native' (Gold, 1958), that is when the researcher becomes so involved and engaged with subjects that they tend to forget the intention of the research.

In this study, my participation as researcher varied during the course of the field visits. In the initial stages, I observed and noted situations without asking questions of stakeholders. Later, when respondents became at ease with my presence and the data collection process, I began to probe further into the why and how issues of situations. Overall, I adopted the non-participant observer role, in which I collected data without performing stakeholders' scheduled activities (de Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2005).

I also conducted the observations in full awareness that one major criticism of this data collection method concerns the lack of validity. Because of the researcher's reliance on his/her own perceptions, the approach is susceptible to bias (Denzin, 1989). Similarly, the method is criticized for lack of reliability. Because there is no statistical analysis to confirm the significance of observed patterns, there is no generalisability (Cohen & Manion, 1994). However, for this study I was informed by the school of thought that observations can be very credible if they are conducted systematically and repeatedly over varying conditions (Denzin, 1989). Therefore, I conducted as many observations as were possible.

In this study, events observed included routines within individual schools, School Development Committee meetings, parents' meetings, and cluster meetings. As reported earlier, the purpose of observations was to witness in practice, how stakeholders understood, experienced and responded to devolved decision-making. School routines observed included day-to-day communication between school heads and teachers, and communication

between school staff and parents. My observation of school routines went on over three weeks during which period I also engaged in the other forms of data gathering.

A total of seven SDC meetings in the whole cluster were observed, comprising two each for two of the five schools and one each for the three remaining schools. The observation process relied on those meetings that had been scheduled independently of my visiting these schools in order to allow the natural flow of events. This accounts for the uneven number of SDC meeting observations per school. However, I scheduled my field data collection period to coincide with when I was sure there would be such meetings occurring in the school calendar. Each observation lasted for as long as the meeting itself. Most such meetings were about one and half to two hours long.

Three parents' meetings, one for each of three out of the five schools in the cluster, were observed. The two other schools had held their parents' meetings shortly before the data collection period commenced. This is one of the limitations of relying on the 'natural' course of events during a specified period of field data collection. Each of the parents' meetings lasted for about two hours and I observed each meeting to the end.

4.6.4 Document analysis

Lincoln and Guba (1985) distinguish documents and records on grounds of whether the text was prepared to attest to some formal transaction. To

illustrate, Hodder (1998, p. 111) suggests that records include marriage certificates, driving licences, building contracts, and banking statements. Documents, on the other hand, are prepared for personal rather than official reasons and would include diaries, memos, letters, and field notes. However, Hodder argues further that in fact, the two terms are often used interchangeably. In this thesis, documents refer to the official records of communication in the Zimbabwean education system, and document analysis refers to examining these records to understand their official meaning.

The utilisation of document analysis as a data collection method in this study was informed by the notion of governance discussed in Chapter Three, which suggests that governance can only be understood within a given legal framework (Smith, MacLennan, & Bordonaro, 1995). Documents constitute the legal framework of any organisation. Document analysis was also informed by the theory of the nature and context of change frame (Fullan, 1993), which suggests, *inter alia*, that change often fails because the context in which it is to be implemented is not clearly understood by those tasked to implement the innovation. Documents are important as reflectors of the context in which change (e.g., decentralised school governance) is understood.

This study analysed the content of a variety of documents to study decentralised school governance in the cluster. Analysis of these documents was intended to facilitate further examination of decision-making patterns around school governance as well as any staff development efforts occurring.

Documents would also reveal some of the possible factors enabling and/or hindering decentralised school governance. Through document analysis, the study sought to establish how various stakeholders defined the school and the cluster. Thus, document analyses enabled further questions pertinent to the study to be generated and pursued through other means of data collection, such as interviews.

Available literature informed the document analysis process that I followed. Through official literature (published and publicly available documents of an organisation), researchers can get access to the 'official perspective' as well as uncover ways through which various school personnel communicate (Adler & Adler, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Henning, with van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) argue that internal documents, that is, those originated and circulated within an organisation, tend to follow a pattern, such as an hierarchical one. Thus, they can reveal rich information about the chain of command, the leadership style and the values in the organisation. For example, students' records may be a fruitful source of data for a qualitative researcher, not so much for the students' records *per se*, but in what collectively they illuminate about those who keep them.

Thus, in using document analysis as a method of data collection, this study was informed by both the need to capture and understand the 'official perspective', as well as the use to which people put records. In some cases, records are created to facilitate dialogue among stakeholders. In others, they are mere directives to stakeholders. Yet in other cases, they may act as a

channel to vent inherent anger and conflict among members. Moreover, the official perspective, while it should inform practice, may be distant from the latter. Thus, document analysis helped to gauge the gap between policy and practice in the setting of the selected cluster.

Documents analysed include minutes of staff, SDC, parents and cluster committee meetings, schools' internal circulars, circulars from District, Regional and Head Offices of Education, newsletters, students' records, the Better Schools Programme's documents on capacity-building activities, and policy documents.

4.7 Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of systematically scrutinising and arranging the observation field notes, interview scripts and other materials one gathered in the field, in order to increase one's understanding of these and to present findings to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The process entails organising data, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, and so on.

This study generated qualitative and quantitative data sets. For my approach to interpreting the qualitative data, I adopted two modes of analysis: analysis-in-the field and after-data-collection analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Both analyses were necessary for specific reasons. The former mode served to provide direction to data collection because of the cumulative nature of qualitative data as alluded to earlier in this chapter. The latter mode constituted the major part of the analysis as it was undertaken when all the

data were captured and, therefore, the entire picture from the field study would emerge.

Analysis in the field followed Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) guidelines for ongoing data collection, which leave one in good stead, after leaving the field, for conducting the final analysis. First, I developed analytic questions as I collected data. These questions shed further light on the initial research areas of focus, allowing for their revision and fine-tuning. Thus, this analytical questioning approach fed into most data collection methods including interviews, observation and document analysis by way of shaping and re-shaping the data collection processes.

Second, data collection sessions must be planned in the light of what the researcher found in previous data-gathering sessions. This facilitated the pursuit of specific leads and required a periodic review of field notes. This cumulative approach also facilitated my decisions as to where and how to spend more time for the remaining period of the field visits. Third, Bogdan and Biklen argue that the researcher needs to write reflective observer comments about ideas being generated during data-gathering sessions. These reflections are the researcher's own thoughts and feelings. In this study, I used such comments to connect various incidents and formulate hunches, among other purposes. Bogdan and Biklen's fourth guideline concerns summaries of what seems to be emerging. I used such summaries to develop links between my numerous reflective observer comments. These memos were also useful in allowing me time to reflect on issues raised by

respondents and how they related to one another. I also utilised the summaries as starting points for categorising data during the final stage of analysis.

During fieldwork, I wrote observer comments in response to obtained data. This allowed me to refine my plans and execute subsequent data collection sessions in the light of previous revelations. I made summaries of emerging findings and categorized data into themes. After data collection, I conducted further analysis by developing coding categories into which data were appropriately located and examined.

I developed a coding system to facilitate my after-data-collection analysis. A coding system is a means of sorting descriptive data so that material pertaining to a given sub-topic can be physically separated from other data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Durrheim, 1999; Henning, with van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). The individual research questions of the study constituted the broad coding categories into which I divided data. This was informed by Bogdan and Biklen's advice that particular research questions and concerns generate certain coding categories. Within the broad categories, I analysed data further through some of the two authors' suggested codes. These are briefly described hereunder.

First, there was the context or research setting code. In this category, I analysed information about the setting and the respondents. This included descriptive statistics about the respondents. Such information allowed the

study to be placed in a larger context. Second, some data were categorised under perspectives held by respondents. This category of codes included such issues as views on the decentralisation trend, role perceptions, shared rules and norms, and so on. Third and finally, a code I dubbed *emerging issues* was used to capture pertinent issues that seemed to emerge from and cut across all the other categories. This code contained data from which conclusions would be drawn.

In relation to quantitative data from the questionnaire, I adopted a descriptive statistical analysis approach (Bailey, 1982). This involved computing frequencies of responses and percentages. These basic statistics were adequate to determine respondents' perceptions regarding the nature and extent of decentralised school governance in the selected cluster. Issues emerging from the statistical analysis were then merged with those emerging from qualitative data.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I described the research methodology adopted for this study. The chapter locates the study in the qualitative research paradigm. As a naturalistic approach, qualitative research was appropriate because the study sought to examine people's understandings and experiences of, and responses to, decentralised school governance. The chapter has defined the study as a multi-site case study of a cluster of schools in which a multi-mode approach to data collection was adopted. This approach was adopted in keeping with the traditions of qualitative research and for its strength, which

lies in triangulation. Also consistent with the qualitative research approach, the chapter has given an account of how the data were analysed throughout the collection process as well as after it.

The next chapter presents a description and analysis of the setting for the Chikanda cluster and its constituent five schools.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Research Setting

Some clusters are actually dying. In fact, the Better Schools Programme is faced with many challenges.⁵

5.1 Introduction

This inquiry aimed at studying decentralised school governance in one cluster of schools: Chikanda located in the Gutu district of Masvingo province, Zimbabwe. In particular, the study sought to examine the ways the cluster and school stakeholders understood, experienced and responded to the decentralisation innovation of the cluster. This chapter describes the setting in which the study was conducted. This setting is necessary for an understanding of the context from which data were collected, analysed and interpreted. The chapter commences with a brief analysis of the history and current state of the cluster system in the country. The chapter then addresses the cluster system at the provincial and district levels of Masvingo province. This serves as a springboard to understanding the Chikanda cluster, selected for study in this thesis. The next section describes each of the member schools in the cluster. In the light of this background, the chapter ends with a section that briefly examines the possibilities for the five schools to work together as a cluster.

⁵ A respondent Education Officer in this study, January 2004.

5.2 The current state of the cluster system in Zimbabwe

As reported in Chapter One, the Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ) was established to spearhead the capacity building of school heads, teachers and parent governors in their efforts to improve the quality of education in schools. During the donor-funded phase, 1993-2002, the management structure of the BSPZ comprised national, provincial, district and cluster offices. The national coordinator would oversee the work of provincial coordinators while the latter would supervise and coordinate the programme's activities throughout the member districts, in tandem with district and cluster representatives. However, both the national and provincial structures were dismantled at the end of the donor period in 2002. The agreement between the donor, the Royal Netherlands government, and the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture at the beginning of the programme was reportedly that the Ministry itself would sustain the programme beyond the donor period. The Ministry has not been able to fund the structures described above, hence the dismantling of the national and provincial structures.

5.2.1 The role of the provincial office in the cluster system

After the dismantling of the national and provincial structures of the BSPZ, provincial coordinators, who in most cases had been recruited from among the education officers in the Ministry, reverted back to their original posts. For example, the former provincial coordinator in Masvingo Province reverted back to her original post as Education Officer in the provincial office. In an interview about the fate of the BSPZ in the province during this post-donor period, she declared:

I am expected, just as a local arrangement, to perform both duties, as BSPZ coordinator and as Education Officer. But there is just too much work to be done by an Education Officer, that I do minimal coordination of the programme. Also, assets like computers and vehicles acquired by the programme are now part of the provincial pool, so communication with districts is now very difficult. In fact, we are simply looking up to the District Education Officers to guide local initiatives in the clusters.

Thus, it can be argued that coordination of the BSPZ at the provincial level was then insignificant, if not completely absent. On what she believed the programme had achieved during the donor-funded period, the former coordinator reported that she believed sensitisation about the programme among the various stakeholders was one of the key achievements. For example, all clusters are now aware that they should be their own initiators of staff development activities among their member schools. Other achievements which she highlighted included the fact that the programme had created 150 clusters in the seven districts of the province; and that many staff development workshops on issues such as discipline in schools, financial management and teaching, had been conducted. However, due to lack of funds, most of the work done through the programme had not been evaluated.

In terms of the attitudes of stakeholders, at both high echelons and grassroots levels of the education system, towards the BSPZ, the former coordinator reported that she perceived all stakeholders saw great potential in the programme and viewed it as a form of organisational self-renewal. However, she also perceived an element of jealousy and resentment on the part of senior officials in the Ministry, who were not directly involved in the programme. This, she contended, was because those, like herself, who were

employed in the programme have been better paid than their counterparts and even some of their former seniors in the Ministry. Allegedly, this had not been well received among officials in the Ministry. At the grassroots, she perceived a general negative attitude among school heads in cases where teachers, as their subordinates, held leadership positions. This attitude seemed to have been informed by the traditional bureaucratic nature of schools, in which school heads lead and teachers are led.

These responses seem to suggest that the post-donor period of the BSPZ is fraught with uncertainty, with the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture failing to invest in the programme any further. Instead, the Ministry disinvested in the programme by taking over the assets that were originally assigned to the programme. The subsequent poor coordination of the programme at the provincial level created somewhat of a vacuum that was likely to impact negatively on the functioning of clusters. Also, as literature reviewed in the previous chapter suggests (for example, Fullan, 1993), the implementation of change, such as the decentralisation of school governance, can only succeed if the attitudes of stakeholders towards the innovation are positive. Therefore, this thesis postulates that negative attitudes of stakeholders in the Chikanda cluster might impact negatively in the implementation of decentralised school governance.

5.2.2 The role of the district office in the cluster system

Although the Better Schools Programme 'died' at national and provincial levels, data from this study suggests that the coordination of cluster activities

remains alive, to some degree, at the district level. My two research visits to the Gutu District Centre of the Better Schools Programme yielded several understandings about the role of the district office in the cluster system in general, and in Chikanda in particular.

The first understanding is that the district office has deployed a District Resource Teacher (DRT) to be responsible for the day-to-day running of the district resource centre. Throughout the country, DRTs have been seconded from their teaching posts to manage the resource centres on a full-time basis. The DRT is responsible for coordinating all the clusters in the district. He/she reports to an Education Officer (EO), who, among other duties, is responsible for all BSPZ activities in the district.

Second, from my visits, I learned that the district resource centre was fairly well resourced, and had numerous records and displays. The main part of the centre housed a library, a reprographic centre, as well as an office for two support staff. The other part comprised two offices, one for the Education Officer and the other for the District Resource Teacher.

Among other things, I examined the centre's documents and the contents of the library. The first set of records that attracted my attention was the cluster files. Each cluster had its own file. Some of the common contents of these files included monthly reports on cluster activities, minutes of meetings, information about office bearers and work plans. One file – unfortunately not of Chikanda cluster – contained a detailed report of a visit to one school by

representatives of partner schools in the cluster. The visit was called an 'Inspection Visit'. In the report were comments about the school's organisation, communication structures, relationships within the school, school ethos and discipline, infrastructure, teaching and some recommendations for improvement. In addition, I was attracted by the cluster action plans contained in the files. Table 5.0 is an example of a cluster action plan extracted from one of the files.

Table 5.0 Cluster action plan: Term 1, 2003

DATE	ACTIVITIES	PARTICIPANTS	FACILITATOR
15 Jan	Analysis of Grade 7 results	Grade 7 teachers	Senior teachers
13 Feb	Science Workshop	Science teachers	Selected Science teachers
19 Mar	Ball Games Coaching Clinic	Coaches	Invited specialist coaches
15 Apr	Practical Subjects workshop	Practical subject teachers	Education officers

Unfortunately, none of this was evident in the Chikanda file, which, I discovered, was not up to date with its records. The cluster action plans in the Chikanda file were two terms behind schedule. There was also nothing like the inspection visit I had seen in the other cluster file. This was an indication that Chikanda cluster was not functioning effectively.

A second aspect I examined of the resource centre was the reprographic section. In this section were a computer, an overhead projector and a duplicating machine. The support member of staff working there reported that they used the computer to generate revenue by selling time to access the Internet and/or type documents. The duplicating machine generated money through being used to reproduce schools' examination papers and other documents, as well as by printing receipt books and school reports. The overhead projector was used during workshops.

The third aspect of the centre, the library section, though small, was rich with some useful literature relating to schools, such as school syllabi, books and pamphlets on HIV and AIDS, books on various school subjects, encyclopaedias, parliamentary debates, booklets on performance appraisal, recruitment and selection of staff, gender, the role of School Development Committees, and so on.

On the walls, the room was also rich with assorted information displayed in charts, such as the details of clusters in the district, including names of member schools. Included on these charts were clusters' bank account numbers. According to the staff, the account numbers were necessary to keep because 30 percent of the levy paid to the district by each cluster would be ploughed back into a cluster's bank account. The district office was responsible for these transactions. Also on the walls were pictures of various historical events of the centre, including its launch and some prize-giving ceremonies.

The District Resource Teacher, who was responsible for all the displays described above, was, unfortunately, on leave during the data collection period for this study. It would have been fruitful to dialogue with him about cluster activities. However, the District Resource Teacher kept a record called the District Resource Teacher's File, which I examined for the study. The file contained monthly reports of activities of the centre, such as workshops held, records of past fund-raising activities, and the amounts raised through each event. The file showed that the local business community and politicians contributed to the centre's welfare through activities such as sponsoring prize-giving functions where top-performing schools in examinations were acknowledged and honoured.

Though very small and crowded, the centre looked well organised and appeared to be educative for teachers and school heads. According to staff at the centre, schools may borrow reading materials from the centre. My observations of the activities and resources at the centre suggest that this was potentially a very useful resource for schools and clusters in the district. The extent to which these were accessed and effectively and adequately utilised in the implementation of decentralised school governance as well as for other aspects of schooling in the district, was not immediately clear from my visits to the centre, and constituted one of the foci for my visits to Chikanda and the various member schools.

To further understand the coordination role at the district level, I interviewed the Education Officer (EO) in charge of the BSPZ, and I enquired about what was entailed in cluster coordination at the district level. He stated:

Knowledge sharing is the major function of the Better Schools Programme. We therefore mount workshops for teachers, heads and School Development Committees. In these workshops, we tackle various topics pertinent to the smooth running of schools. We have many ideas but lack of funds is our greatest problem.

With regard to what specific topics they tackled, he responded:

In the area of management, we try and share knowledge and skills in topics such as finance, record keeping, time management, innovation and management of conflict. In the curriculum area, we tackle issues like syllabus interpretation, the teaching of specific subjects, use of various media, and we also review Grade 7, Ordinary and Advanced level examination results.

On whether they addressed issues of performance management, an area in which school heads seemed to lack skills, the EO reported that, owing to a lack of funds, not much had been done by way of training the relevant stakeholders. According to the EO, this meant that government's intention to link pay to performance was difficult to implement. The EO also reported that, as a district, they had started a prize-giving project to give incentives to schools to perform better in national examinations:

At the beginning of each academic year like now, cluster chairpersons are asked to submit analyses of results of their schools. Using these records, we then rank schools according to performance. The top five schools in each of primary and secondary schools will then receive prizes that year.

In response to queries about how the district cluster activities were financed, the EO reported that while they benefited from some local donor funding (such as from local business persons), they largely relied on school levies. He

confirmed that a third of the levy that came from a cluster each term was ploughed back to the cluster. In addition, the money generated through levying clusters was used to buy library books, to pay salaries for the support staff, and to finance staff development workshops. However, he lamented that some schools defaulted on their levy payments and this had a negative implication on attempts at achieving the centre's goals. As argued in Chapter One of this thesis, defaulting on payments is not unexpected since unemployment and poverty are high in this district and the little money that families can access has to take care of basic needs such as nutrition and shelter.

In terms of the district's response to defaulting schools, the EO reported that there was no legal instrument to enforce payment of these levies. This is confirmed by the Provincial Education Director's *Circular 2* (Ministry of Education Sports and Culture. Provincial Education Director, 2000), which stipulates, among other things, that no pupil shall be excluded from schooling on the basis of failure to pay a levy. The EO added:

Our only means of enforcement is that a cluster that is not fully paid up shall not get its quota. Through this ruling, the cluster members themselves would have to pressurise one another. We also try to impress upon school heads to acquit themselves and their schools in this regard, because they have a lot to gain if they pay.

In the context of scarce resources and unemployment as described above, this seemed both unrealistic and unreasonable and indicated a possible and important factor that might negatively undermine the success of decentralised school governance in the district.

Regarding how successful he thought cluster coordination was in the district, the EO asserted that:

The cluster system has facilitated continuous dialogue between teachers and parents. Parents are now more informed about the need for partnership with the school. But sensitisation is not yet enough. Some clusters are actually dying. In fact, the BSPZ is faced with many challenges.

Among the challenges he identified, the EO highlighted the lack of funds as a major obstacle to decentralised school governance and to schooling in general. On one hand, the levy was only one Zimbabwean dollar per child per term and, according to him, it was too little to achieve most of the goals. On the other, as already discussed, most parents in this district and elsewhere were poor, and some could not afford to pay this amount. This also means that such levies could not be increased in tandem with economic trends, more so because parents themselves were legally mandated to determine such increases. As a result, no official was able to travel and resuscitate those clusters that were on the verge of financial collapse, or to encourage those that were active.

A related problem that the EO also reported was that, owing to a lack of funds, communication with clusters had become problematic. The district centre largely relied on sending circulars to cluster resource teachers through school heads when they came to collect pay sheets and conduct other school business. The reliability of this means of communication was doubtful and rendered additional relationship challenges, as indicated by the EO:

It is not always reliable. In a number of cases, these circulars do not reach the resource teacher. Heads tend to disrespect any

activities led by teachers. On the other hand, teachers fear to be victimised by the heads, so they do not often challenge them.

Another challenge he reported was that the District Resource Teacher, like the Cluster Resource Teacher, did not get any allowance. As a result, his/her position did not carry much weight when it came to conducting workshops and asserting any authority over cluster members. Also, this lack of incentive tended to undermine morale, further impacting negatively on the activities of the cluster schools in particular, and on decentralisation of school governance in general. The EO reiterated that such work needed to be remunerated if the teacher's morale were to be improved.

During one of my visits to the district resource centre, the EO arranged for an interview with a representative of another cluster in the district, a primary school head. First, I sought his views about how functional their cluster was, to which he responded:

It is very active. We now have a cluster resource centre comprising two rooms loaned to us by one of our schools. We asked member schools to donate chairs for the centre. So far we have a few books, magazines and circulars stocked there.

Second, I was also keen to know what staff development activities the cluster engaged in. The representative reported that staff development activities in the cluster involved teachers meeting to set common tests in the various subject areas, and engaging in joint inspection visits of member schools as a way of helping one another to improve service delivery. According to him, such visits entailed inspecting buildings, teaching, the school's management

practice, and so on. Inspection teams comprised teachers, school heads and SDC members. He added:

We hold staff development workshops in areas such as financial management, income generation, management of new curricula, coaching of new sporting games and post-mortems of national examination results.

These responses suggest that this other cluster was functioning well, which prompted me to enquire about how they financed these many activities. He reported that in addition to pupil levies, education professionals in the cluster, i.e. teachers and heads, paid monthly contributions of \$Z500 each. According to him, initially, teachers and heads resisted the idea of having to contribute money to the cluster, but through specific projects such as the creation of the resource centre and relevant workshops, everyone began to see the benefits of the cluster system for their own personal and professional development as well as the development of the cluster. However, he indicated that a shortage of resources was still the cluster's greatest challenge since local contributions, while appreciated, were not significant in relation to what was needed.

The report about the state of the cluster system at the district level suggests that this approach towards decentralising the running of education has great potential. For example, the attempts at generating funds from the key stakeholders within and around the schools could be seen as a sound attempt at widening participation in decision-making, encouraging self-reliance, and growing a sense of ownership of schools among local stakeholders. However, with low teacher salaries and high levels of unemployment and poverty in communities, the sustainability of such efforts is questionable. In addition,

communication between the centre and schools is weak. The result is that the district centre seemed to know little about what took place in clusters, save for what was disclosed in written reports. This lack of contact appears to give rise to increased suspicion on the part of the schools, particularly regarding the use of funds at the district level. It also suggests that there is little or no staff development occurring at the district level, although neat plans exist to this effect. Thus, lack of sound communication is likely to impact negatively on cluster activities.

The fact that schools are not legally bound to pay levies to the cluster makes the shortage of resources for the programme more acute. It suggests that if decentralisation efforts are to succeed, some legal framework to bind stakeholder behaviour is necessary. As the situation stands, the cluster system is practically tantamount to a voluntary intervention. Also, power relations among school heads and teachers emerge as an influential factor to cluster activities. The former seem to resist the latter's leadership. This study investigated how these factors impacted on decentralised school governance.

Having gained some understanding of the cluster system from the perspective of the district level, as described above, and using this knowledge as my springboard, I then entered Chikanda cluster. The next section describes each of the schools that make up the cluster.

5.3 Chikanda cluster

As a cluster, Chikanda is made up of five schools: Boka, Mishi, Mari, Pfunji,

and Konde (all pseudonyms). While the study focused on the cluster as a whole, having adopted the multi-site case study research design as described in Chapter Four, each of the five schools in the cluster constituted a research site. As described in Chapter One, schools are clustered for purposes of staff development, but individual schools are still responsible for their own governance and management. As such, a description of each site is necessary as a way of gauging the possibilities for the cluster member schools to work together in a devolved decision-making environment. I gathered information about each site through formal and informal discussion with the stakeholders: parents, community members, teachers and school heads. The findings from these are discussed below.

5.3.1 Boka Primary School

Boka Primary is a rural district council-owned (RDC) school. Like in all RDC-owned schools, the local councillor represents the RDC in the School Development Committee (SDC), but is an *ex officio* member only. The school is situated less than one kilometre from a busy highway. This proximity to a main road, with good access to public transport, makes the school attractive to teachers seeking teaching posts. Apart from the main road, an electricity power line passes through the school. However, at the time of data collection for this study, the community had not harnessed enough funds to electrify the school, despite the fact that the line had been in place for five years. This was some indicator of the level of poverty within the community whose children attend this school and who pay levies towards school funding.

A few metres outside the school property there is a small dam built at the time the main road was being constructed, mainly to supply water to the school. At full capacity, the dam could possibly supply water for both the school garden and the local community's livestock for the entire year. Unfortunately, neither the school nor the community has enough financial resources to pump the water. The school gets its drinking water from a nearby borehole.

By virtue of its geographical location, Boka Primary sources learners from two wards, and this yields particular challenges relating to wards. A ward is made up of about ten villages. A village contains about 30 households. Ward demarcations are an administrative structure of the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works. In terms of school governance, a school serving two or more wards is more complex to govern than a single-ward one because it entails harmonising parents from different localities. Such harmonisation is often difficult because of inherent differences among the communities, such as those relating to geographical boundaries. Also, in some cases, donors such as those targeting orphans may, due to limited resources, operate in only one of the wards and pay fees for that ward's targeted learners alone. This often results in friction among parents. Through an interview with members of the Boka School Development Committee, it emerged that Boka Primary was currently facing this challenge, where a donor was paying fees for orphans in only one of the two wards, and efforts were underway to persuade the donors to include both constituencies.

Boka Primary's local community is largely made up of subsistence farmers.

Most locals' economic resource bases are so weak that some fail to generate enough food for their own families, even during a good agricultural season. Other menial income-generating activities that community members engage in include selling traditional beer, fruit, vegetables and craft artefacts. Most families also rely on their sons, daughters and relatives working in urban areas for additional support. Such poverty in the community negatively impacts the financial resource base of the school, which relies heavily on parents for funding. For example, Boka Primary's SDC has difficulty recommending market-related fees to the parents, who must approve them before they are put into effect.

The school receives learners who present, collectively, a rainbow of religious persuasions: traditional African religion, indigenous protestant Christian denominations (with some worshipping under trees), and the older, more established Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic and Methodist churches. As a Rural District Council-owned institution, the school does not and cannot align itself to any one religious denomination, although most such schools tend to inculcate Christian principles. This commonality in the Christian faith provides a unifying bond for the diverse school stakeholders. Thus, there is unlikely to be conflict among parents regarding religious education, which constitutes part of the curriculum.

Through informal discussions with some community members, it emerged that, though lowly educated, most adults are able to read and write in their home language. However, they are severely constrained in their command of

English, the official language of communication in the country, and the medium in which all education policies are written and communicated to the public. Obviously, the predominance of the English language is likely to have negative implications on parents' ability to understand and articulate themselves in relation to school governance issues.

The school population at Boka Primary is made up of 11 teachers and 391 pupils. Of these teachers, only two are male. The acting school head, one of the males, was unhappy about this gender imbalance. He contended that some gender balance in the staff was necessary in the interest of the developmental needs of pupils.

In a school of this size, the school head is required to teach a full class, over and above his/her headship role. This scenario, of a full-time teaching school head, leaves little room for the incumbent to invest in school governance issues. As reported by both teachers and school heads the teacher-pupil ratio allowed by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture is 1:40. This means that the school was actually overstaffed by one teacher. As a result, the school was intent on attracting new pupils. On this matter, the acting school head had this to say:

Since this is beginning of year, we are hoping to receive more first graders. We might have to resort to persuading some parents with 6 year olds in pre-school to move them to Grade 1, in order to maintain the 11 teachers.

On further dialoguing with the acting school head, it emerged that a bigger school was not simply a source of prestige on the part of the entire

community; it was attended by practical dividends such as a higher per capita grant from government and non-teaching status for the school head.

Two of the 11 teachers in the school (including the acting school head) were about to complete their first university degrees. The rest of the staff held a standard primary school teaching qualification: the Diploma in Education. According to current Zimbabwean standards, this staff profile constitutes a well-qualified corps.

The acting school head reported that the school had shrunk in terms of enrolment over the past six or so years. He asserted that the major cause had been financial mismanagement on the part of the previous school head, which allegedly led to some parents transferring their children to neighbouring schools. Some of the neighbouring schools in question were those in the cluster under study. Thus, the need to enrol more pupils appeared to elicit more competition than cooperation among these schools. Letters in the school files, from the Ministry of the Public Service (the employer of all civil servants in the country), showed that the said previous school head had been charged with misappropriation of school funds and demoted to teacher grade. This misconduct reportedly had created a rift between parents and school staff, negatively affecting the necessary cooperation in school governance.

One distinctive physical feature at Boka Primary School was the unfinished construction of a classroom block, which showed signs of old age, despite its incompleteness. The chairperson of the School Development Committee

(SDC) reported that the building had been in this state for the past seven years. He attributed this problem to the same former school head, which he accused of having betrayed the trust of parents in matters of school expenditure. He explained:

At some stage during Mr [Gara's]⁶ headship, school-community relations became so sour that some adults would drive their cattle into the school garden and ask him to respond if he wanted trouble, but we have since got over that stage.

The irony around the unfinished classroom block was that, although the acting school head and SDC had the completion of the block high on their agenda as one of the priorities for that year, because it had become an eye sore and a stigma, dwindling enrolments meant that the new classrooms were unlikely to be occupied in the short-term.

The school was in a state of transition, from one type of leadership to another, and the ills of the previous manager were impacting on the priorities of the new regime. Overall, the nature of school-community relations at Boka Primary seemed to be a crucial factor in their school governance discourse. On one hand, with the change in leadership, Boka Primary's community had renewed its confidence in the way their school was run. Such confidence is likely to be enabling for decentralised school governance since it allows for local participation in decision-making, and hopefully, cooperation in the cluster. On the other hand, the lingering negative effects of the previous style of leadership were still being felt and could jeopardise this confidence. In

⁶ A pseudonym.

addition, the poverty-stricken status of the community can be a further constraint in the school's governance.

The above information about Boka Primary suggests that the school was operating effectively in the context of a cluster and decentralised governance. Subsequently, the mistrust and apathy among parents that characterised school-community relationships for some time had become a thing of the past. In addition, teachers in the school are well qualified to fruitfully contribute to cluster activities.

5.3.2 Mishi Central Primary School

Mishi Central Primary is a mission primary school owned and run by the Roman Catholic Church. It is situated at a mission station, in a farm surrounded by villages from which it draws pupils. The mission station is about two and a half kilometres from the highway passing by Boka Primary. The school's catchment area also comprises two wards. While a School Development Committee (SDC) runs Mishi Primary, as per government requirement, the priest-in-charge at the mission oversees all the school's operations, as required by the church. Thus, the priest-in-charge is an ex-officio member of the School Development Committee. On matters relating to education, the priest reports to the diocesan Education Secretary, who is the manager of all the church's schools in that diocese. The Education Secretary liaises with the provincial and head offices of education of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture.

The Mishi Central Primary earned the status of 'central' during the late 1960s and early 70s. At that time, the term referred to schools that offered a full 8-year primary school programme i.e. Sub A to Standard 6, when most African primary schools only offered classes up to Standard 3 i.e. five years of primary schooling. Thus, pupils came from surrounding schools and even beyond, to further their education at Mishi Central Primary. The reference to centrality, then, signified status rather than geography. By 2004, when I conducted my fieldwork, all primary schools were offering a full 8-year programme. Nevertheless, Mishi Central Primary retained its prestigious status, as had other schools with the same history.

As a mission establishment, Mishi Central Primary has piped water, electricity and telephone facilities. On my first visit to the school, while in the school head's office, he received a number of telephone calls from local people working in other parts of the country and who were sending messages home. The school head would relay the messages to the relevant pupils who, in turn, would take them home. The school head reported that this was part of the school's community service: sound benevolence, I thought. The resultant goodwill is likely to create an atmosphere conducive for healthy school-community relations.

Within the mission station there is a pre-school, boarding secondary school, clinic, farm, monastery and convent. The farm produces milk, beef, pork, maize, beans and vegetables. It runs a grinding mill that serves both the mission and local communities. It also operates a carpentry workshop that

makes and sells coffins, among other products. The mission is, thus, almost self-sufficient in terms of the basic needs of its community.

As was the case for Boka Primary, the general level of education among the adults of Mishi community is low. They are engaged predominantly in subsistence farming. However, part of the community comprises resettled farmers who, because of their agricultural knowledge and skills, tend to be more productive. Some are commercially oriented, though this is on a small scale. This puts Mishi Central Primary on a better financial footing than Boka Primary, in terms of what parents are capable of contributing to the school.

On the religious front, Mishi's community is predominantly, and understandably so, Catholic. Minority religious groups include members of long-established protestant churches and newer, indigenous ones. The distance between Boka and Mishi Primary Schools is only 8 kilometres, so that the two communities are similar. While Mishi does not discriminate against pupils according to their religious backgrounds (and even if the school wanted to do this, it would be contrary to government policy), all pupils attending the school are taught and expected to observe Catholic Church social and religious teachings. This attendance proviso is consistent with government policy.

As a result of the various facilities described above, Mishi is a big school. At the time of the study, its enrolment was 750. The teaching staff complement was 20, comprising 8 males and 12 females. This constitutes a better gender

balance than at Boka Primary. Two teachers were university graduates, while eight were studying for their degrees by distance education. Thus, overall, the staff is highly qualified.

Because of the size of school enrolment, the school head does not have to teach. This leaves him with ample time to manage the school. An interview with Mishi's school head to further enquire into school sizes and their implications for the teaching or non-teaching status of the school head revealed that a school has to have an enrolment of 600 pupils (15 teachers) or more, for a school head to be non-teaching.

The mission station is a great service-provider to the surrounding community, given its said facilities. In addition to that advantage, the school's reputation associated with its past 'central' status makes it attractive to the local community. Many parents also desire to send their children to this school because it has a long history of good academic performance. These and other factors seem to be conducive to decentralised school governance. Mishi Central Primary is the most resourced of the five schools in the cluster. Endowed with electricity, the school is an asset for major cluster meetings and workshops that may require the use of electricity-based technologies. Also, the presence of other facilities, such as the clinic, lends Mishi an additional character of centrality for the other schools in the cluster. As a result, most cluster meetings tended to be held at Mishi (*Interview with Cluster Resource Teacher*).

5.3.3 Mari Primary School

Mari Primary School is the second of the two mission schools in the Chikanda cluster. The school is situated 4 kilometres from Mishi, at one end of the same farm. Mari Primary is also owned and run by the same Responsible Authority as runs Mishi Central Primary, namely, the Roman Catholic Church. The same priest-in-charge oversees these two schools.

Mari was built to serve two major purposes. First, Mishi Primary had become over-stretched by over-enrolment because of its status and performance, as reported earlier. Second, when new homes emerged on neighbouring farms due to government's resettlement of the landless peasants shortly after independence in 1980, the Responsible Authority sought to reduce the long walking distances suffered by pupils from these homesteads. Thus, the community living in Mari Primary's catchment area are almost identical in socio-economic terms to the community that Mishi Central Primary serves. The level of education among the adults in the local community is the same as reported for the other two schools above.

The strength of Mishi Central Primary had led to Mari Primary remaining a small school. At the time of the study, it comprised 6 teachers (4 males and 2 females) and 220 pupils. The school head confirmed that the school was not envisaged to grow significantly in the foreseeable future. One teacher in the school was pursuing university studies. The rest have the standard teacher qualifications.

Unlike its sister school, Mari Primary did not have piped water and electricity, nor a telephone facility. However, the school is endowed with abundant water from a perennial stream as well as a borehole in its vicinity. For services, such as post and telephone, Mari Primary depends on Mishi, the bigger of the two 'sister' schools. Thus, if there is a school that has a great need to work together with its neighbouring school, it is Mari Primary. Nevertheless, as with other schools in the country, Mari Primary has its own SDC and, therefore, runs its own affairs independently.

As was the case at Boka Primary, by virtue of the size of his school, the school head of Mari Primary had to grapple with full-time class teaching and the management of the school. The low enrolment situation at Mari Primary was made worse by the fact that one teacher taught a composite class of two grades. This again was because of the 1:40 teacher-pupil ratio national requirement referred to earlier. The school was the smallest in the Chikanda cluster. Perhaps its 'smallness' may instil greater need for close cooperation and interaction with neighbouring schools, thus strengthening the cluster concept. Based on interviews with teachers and the school head in the school, my analysis suggests that the school was conducive to effective participation in the cluster.

5.3.4 Pfungi Primary School

Situated about five kilometres away from the main road that passes Boka Primary, and about six kilometres from Mishi Central Primary, Pfungi Primary is another Rural District Council-owned school in the cluster. No public means

of transport serves Pfungi Primary so, in the country where most teachers rely on public transport, teachers usually walk the five kilometres to the main road. This long walking distance makes Pfungi Primary a less attractive place of deployment for teachers. The school is in a social setting similar to that of Boka Primary, but one of its distinguishing features is that the farmers in Pfungi's vicinity are far more productive than those around Boka. Paradoxically, on my second visit to the institution, the school office had just been burgled and science kits and other valuables stolen.

With regard to religious affiliation, Pfungi's community is predominantly Christian Apostolic Faith followers. However, there are also adherents to other Christian churches such as Roman Catholic, Reformed Church in Zimbabwe, Zion and Methodist. One noteworthy characteristic of the version of the Apostolic Faith church in the area is its strict ruling to its followers against consumption of alcohol. The school neither had electricity nor piped water. It sourced drinking water from a borehole nearby and from a nearby stream for other purposes. The school was also without a telephone service, thus making communication with the outside world difficult. The levels of formal education in the parent community were as low as described above for the other three schools.

The school head of Pfungi Primary reported that the school worked closely with the local chief, by way of communicating with him about key developments and decisions at the school. This contact did not seem to prevail in the other schools studied as much as it did at Pfungi Primary. The

government of Zimbabwe is empowering traditional leaders to make significant decisions in their areas of jurisdiction. For example, chiefs are party to the allocation of land. Their blessings must also be sought in all rural development projects undertaken by government or non-government organisations within their constituencies. Therefore, it is timely and enabling to decentralised school governance for the school to create such a relationship.

Pfungi Primary, like Boka and Mari, was also a small school. At the time of the study, it comprised 11 teachers (4 females and seven males) and 400 pupils. Two staff members, including the school head, are university graduates. The school head proudly showed me his recently acquired final results for the Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of South Africa. The rest of the staff has the standard teacher qualifications.

Unlike Boka and Mari primary schools, Pfungi Primary was experiencing a gradual upward trend in enrolment. Nevertheless, the school head still taught a full class, as is policy in such small schools, thus also leaving him little time to attend to school governance and related issues.

At the time of the study, the school head had been leading the school for one year. His predecessor had moved to another school on promotion. The latter's predecessor had left the school on normal retirement after serving the school for twenty years. Thus the school can be said to have enjoyed stable continuity in leadership for many years. My initial analysis was that this would put the school in good standing for devolved decision-making. In addition, the

religious homogeneity and relative economic viability of the community around Pfungi Primary, complemented by stability in the leadership of the school, seemed to provide a promising foundation for decentralised school governance. Although Pfungi Primary is less accessible than its other cluster members described above, its classrooms were better maintained than at Boka. Although the school may not have had many material resources to share with its cluster members, its evident steady growth in enrolment and stability in leadership certainly would have acted as good examples to other cluster members. Whether these advantages would enable the school to operate effectively within the context of a cluster, was the focus of this study.

5.3.5 Konde Primary School

Konde Primary, the fifth and last of the schools in the Chikanda cluster, is also owned by the Rural District Council. The school is 10 kilometres away from the main road referred to earlier, and six kilometres away from its nearest cluster neighbour, Mari Primary. Thus, Konde Primary is the farthest of the schools from a public transport service. This tends to make the school the least attractive to teacher job seekers and as a venue for cluster meetings. However, Konde Primary's potential advantage is that the cluster resource teacher is employed at the school.

The general levels of education among the adult population are also the same as described for the other schools. Unlike some of the other schools, Konde Primary draws its pupils from one ward only. The school's catchment area also comprises subsistence farmers. The soils around Konde Primary are as

sandy and unproductive as those around Boka Primary, a legacy of colonial rule. The colonial term for such areas was 'tribal trust land' or 'reserves', both terms denoting derelict land entrusted to (by the white colonial ruler) but not owned by the black population. This scenario gave rise, after independence, to resettlement schemes referred to earlier in areas around Mari and Mishi schools. Unfortunately, these schemes did not benefit everyone. In some cases also, potential beneficiaries of the resettlement schemes refused to cut ties with their 'roots' and turned down offers to move to more productive land. However, even under these geographical difficulties, most families grow crops and keep livestock, though these are sufficient to feed their families only.

The religious 'landscape' of Konde Primary shows that the community is largely Christian. Indigenous and relatively new Christian denominations, as opposed to foreign and older ones, seem to dominate. The adherents of these indigenous Christian churches are conspicuous by their outfits, such as full-length white robes, multi-coloured scarves, clean-shaven heads and long beards. In addition, these people 'love' the big local Marula and other trees as their God-given, ready-made places of worship.

Konde Primary is a small school, with, at the time of the study, an enrolment of 340 pupils and a staff compliment of nine teachers (six males and three females). With such a low enrolment and small staff, it was necessary that the school head taught a full class. The school head reported that the school had maintained this small size for quite some time. He cited the proximity of a number of other competing primary schools as the major contributory factor.

Three staff members (including the school head) are university graduates. The classroom blocks at Konde Primary were showing wear and tear and, although they were still habitable, they needed repair. Nevertheless, the sound workmanship from the 1960s when these classrooms were constructed was still evident. Arguably, the economic status of the community could be gauged from the state of disrepair of the classrooms.

Konde Primary was not electrified, neither were there any indications that such a facility would be available in the near future. Government's pronounced Rural Electrification Programme intended to benefit, among other beneficiaries, all schools, still had to service many schools, including Konde. Like Boka, Mari and Pfungi primaries, Konde Primary was also without a telephone system. From my conversation with the school heads of these schools, it was clear that because of no effective means of communication between schools and district and provincial offices of education as well as with other stakeholders, they had become a major source of information because they often travelled to town on school business. In the process, they seemed to wield substantial power, not only within their schools, but also in the community. Was this power put to sound use, I wondered? What was certain was that the Konde Primary school head was pivotal to school governance in general, and decentralised school governance in particular.

The school head of Konde Primary was a local man, whose home is about three kilometres away from the school. Thus, he lived at home and drove or walked to work every morning. He had been head at the school for the past

eight years. Thus, the school had a long time of continuity under one leader. Because he was local, the school head interacted with SDC members far beyond the confines of formal SDC meetings. In this, there was potential to create sound school-community relations due to this school-community extension, as much as there was a possibility for protracted and entrenched tension that could arise in the community and carry over to the school. How would such relations and effects influence decentralised school governance? This study sought to investigate these and other issues.

The site descriptions of Chikanda cluster presented above raise a few issues regarding the possibilities for the schools under study to work as a cluster. The next section briefly examines these issues.

5.4 Chikanda as a cluster

In this study, I was interested in the extent to which the nature of the different school contexts, as described above, would facilitate or hinder their participation in the cluster and the implementation of decentralised school governance. The above discussion suggests that, on the one hand, three factors exist to facilitate effective devolution of school governance in the context of a school cluster. On the other, there are also factors that hinder such processes. I discuss these enabling and hindering factors in the next two sub-sections.

5.4.1 Enabling factors

First, the major rationale for grouping the five schools into one cluster was

their close proximity to one another. The proximity factor is why parents are able to transfer their children from one school to another with the children still being able to walk to and from school. By and large, the communities the schools serve are one people, socio-culturally speaking. For example, many churches referred to in this chapter draw their followers from both within and beyond individual schools' catchment areas. Thus, from the point of view of these community-profile considerations, and given no visible or protracted school-community tensions, the cluster has potential to function as one unit to improve delivery in individual schools.

Second, as reported in this chapter, the general level of qualifications among teachers was quite high (see also Chapter Six). Thus, the human resource to spearhead staff development and make the cluster a learning-enriched, as opposed to a learning-impooverished organisation (Fullan, 1993), seems to be available. Continuous search for knowledge in a learning-enriched organisation helps to soundly inform decision-making processes. The next chapter analyses stakeholders' perceptions of their capacity to function effectively in a decentralised system.

Third, the existence of a School Development Committee (SDC), as a standard governance structure in each school, can go some way towards achieving localised school governance as well as build cooperation within the cluster. For example, local councillors, who are ex-officio members of each SDC, meet often to discuss various issues relating to community development. Such meetings can serve as a conduit towards cooperation.

School heads are likely to meet often, thus they may constitute another rallying point.

5.4.2 Disabling factors

Overall, the communities served by schools in the cluster were economically poor. This poverty undermines the possibilities for schools to pool their resources. Individual schools may not have much to share by way of material resources and they may not see benefits in working together with an equally struggling neighbour. For example, a school may not have the funds to cover staff travel expenses to and from cluster meetings and workshops.

Nevertheless, poverty, as a common phenomenon, can be used to strengthen the schools if they realise that sharing the little they have as individual institutions can bring about collective benefits. Material poverty can act also as a source of inspiration for people to improve themselves. The next chapter examines how these issues impacted upon decentralised school governance.

In addition, as reported earlier in this chapter, the difficulties of four of the five member schools being small pointed to the greater benefit in being a big school. For example, the small schools in the cluster were working intensely towards increasing their enrolments, in order to be bigger schools. This process entails, in some cases, a school attracting learners away from its neighbouring school. This has potential for creating a paradox: a simultaneous competition and cooperation among cluster member schools. Too much of the former is likely to impact negatively on the latter. In turn, lack of cooperation would adversely affect the cause of the cluster concept.

The absence of the basic means of telecommunication, namely telephones, in four of the five schools in the cluster, is likely to negatively impact on possibilities for working together among the schools in the cluster. This handicap is likely to affect teachers most, as their job entails being in the classroom for the greater part of the day, unlike school heads that have to travel more often.

The next chapter presents and discusses the main findings of the study.

CHAPTER SIX

Through the 'Eye' of the Cluster: The Research Findings

There is need to re-awaken the cluster. The cluster system, to me, is a white elephant.⁷

6.1 Introduction

The study presented in this thesis was premised on the notion that implementing decentralised school governance in a cluster of schools would depend on the stakeholders' understandings and experiences of, and responses to the policy and process, and that a variety of factors, such as the availability or lack of resources and capacity for stakeholders to function effectively therein, would impact on the success or failure of the process.

Thus, the study revolved around three research questions:

- How do the stakeholders in the cluster understand and experience decentralised school governance?
- What are the stakeholders' views regarding their capacity to function effectively in a decentralised school governance system?
- What are their experiences and views on the factors that hinder and/or enable decentralised school governance in the cluster?

⁷ A respondent teacher in the present study, January 2004.

In seeking to explain decentralised school governance in one cluster (referred to as Chikanda in this report) of five primary schools (Mishi, Pfungi, Boka, Mari and Konde) in the Gutu District of Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe, this study utilised a multi-site case study approach to address the above questions. Data collection methods included a combination of a questionnaire, interviews, observations and document analyses. The unit of analysis was the five schools, as constituted in a cluster.

In this chapter, findings of the data are aggregated across the five schools, rather than presented as five separate case studies. The decision to analyse and discuss the data in this way was informed by the nature of the findings themselves, in that no significant differences were found in the responses among the schools. However, in a few instances I discuss separately those specific findings that pertain to particular schools.

From both the study's research questions and the obtained data, three themes emerge:

- Stakeholders' understandings and experiences of, and responses to decentralised school governance;
- Stakeholders' perceptions of their capacities to function effectively in a decentralised system; and
- Factors that hinder and/or enable decentralised school governance in the cluster.

While this chapter is organised around these themes, the latter theme was

found to relate very closely to each of the other themes, to the extent that it would be artificial and unproductive to tackle it separately. As such, findings regarding this theme are integrated into the other themes and permeate the entire discussion, with a brief section to summarise issues relating to this theme at the end. Chapter Four also highlighted issues around this theme. Overall, while the chapter adopts the thematic approach described above, there exist overlaps in the issues across the themes. As such, the thematic boundaries can be described as being porous.

The chapter commences with a recapping of the features in a decentralised system of school governance, as discussed in Chapter Two. Such a reiteration is necessary as a barometer to decentralisation efforts in the cluster under study. Second, stakeholders' understandings and experiences of, and responses to decentralised school governance in the cluster are examined. This is done through examining findings on how, from the point of view of the stakeholders, school governance decision-making authority in specific areas was decentralised. Third, findings on stakeholders' capacity to implement the decentralisation policy are discussed. This is tackled through examining data on stakeholders' views on the role of the Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe as a capacity builder and the extent to which it has successfully built capacity in the cluster. Fourth, the chapter summarises the factors that enable and/or inhibit decentralised school governance. Finally, the chapter closes with a brief discussion of the issues that emerge from the findings and their interpretation. While the chapter presents and discusses data following a general pattern of starting with school heads' responses,

followed by teachers', and then parents', the response boundaries are porous depending on the nature of the data.

6.2 Features of a decentralised system of school governance

Chapter Two identifies three key features of a decentralised system of school governance. The first feature involves the kinds of decisions that are decentralised. To illustrate, decentralised school governance entails the shifting of power from the centre to the periphery of an organisation or system, in this case, from provincial and district offices of education to schools and clusters. Such a shift entails the devolution of authority to make decisions in given areas. As available literature suggests (for example, Rideout & Ural, 1993), while no system is likely to decentralise all decisions within its jurisdiction, meaningful decentralisation should involve key decisions about the running of the organisation. Some of the key areas that characterise a decentralised system of school governance include decisions regarding school organisation, financial resources, human resources, pupil admissions and the curriculum (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). For example, in terms of the first aspect of this feature, school organisation encompasses matters of school structure, the distribution of time and the determination of class sizes. The more an institution has authority to organise its own affairs, the more likely the stakeholders would feel a sense of belonging and ownership. The second aspect of this feature is that the financial resources of an organisation determine the opportunities and options available to it. Thus, a self-governing

school is expected to make decisions on important financial matters such as the sources of its funds, the charging of fees and budgeting. A third aspect is that a decentralised school system needs to make some decisions about its human resources. Human resources are the greatest assets of any organisation, because they can transform and utilize all other resources available in the organisation. Decisions related to this area include the hiring and firing, the remuneration, and the development and appraisal of staff. Fourth, since schools are supposed to be learning centres where the learner is the focal point, decisions about pupil admissions are important. Thus, a decentralised system must make decisions regarding this matter. The fifth aspect of this feature is that the curriculum constitutes the core business of any school. Therefore decentralised school governance must involve the making of some curriculum decisions, such as the selection of textbooks, instructional methods and curriculum content.

The second feature of a decentralised school governance system is the stakeholders' capacity to effectively implement the innovation. This study was premised on the notion that the success of any innovation depends largely on the stakeholders' capacity to implement it. For example, the extent to which the key stakeholders have the necessary basic knowledge and skills determines how successful the implementation of the innovation such as making decisions at a decentralised level becomes. Such knowledge and skills include numeracy, literacy, organisational and communication competences. These are necessary to enable stakeholders to, among other things, make informed decisions. Beyond these basic skills, stakeholders in a

decentralised school governance system need to become managers and leaders rather than administrators only. As administrators, stakeholders would merely implement decisions made elsewhere, usually in the higher tiers of the education system. However, as managers, they would be involved in planning, controlling and coordinating the functions of the organisation.

The third important feature of decentralised school governance is shared decision-making. One of the major goals of decentralising education systems is to democratise the running of such systems. Democratisation entails the optimal involvement of all stakeholders in making decisions about the running of an organisation. This places an emphasis on shared decision-making. Thus, a truly decentralised school system should be characterised by active participation of all stakeholders in decision-making. As with the issue of capacity, decision-making permeates all activities in an organisation. Therefore, findings about how the cluster practised shared decision-making, if any, are discussed across all the sections of the chapter.

6.3 Stakeholders' understandings and experiences of, and responses to, decentralised school governance

This section seeks to address the question: how do stakeholders in the cluster understand, experience and respond to decentralised school governance? In the course of the discussion, as indicated in the introduction of this chapter, factors that enable and/or hinder decentralised school governance emerge. In this section, findings are discussed through the five key areas of decision-making identified in the preceding section namely; Pupil Admission, School

Organisation, Curriculum, Financial Resources and Human Resources. Each of the five areas was broken down into sub-items for greater specificity (see also Chapters Two and Four).

The study used a variety of means to investigate decentralised school governance in the cluster. First, teachers in the cluster were asked to respond to a questionnaire. Among other issues, the questionnaire asked them to indicate on a 0-4 point scale,⁸ the extent to which they felt authority to make decisions in given decisional areas had been decentralised to the school level, and the extent to which they felt involved in making decisions in those areas. In addition to the rating, respondents were asked to substantiate their responses in comments. A total of 40 teachers responded. Second, focus group interviews were conducted among the teachers in order to obtain deeper insights about their levels of participation in school governance. Third, other stakeholders, namely, school heads, School Development Committee members and Education Officers, were interviewed. Fourth, documents such as circulars, policies and minutes of meetings were analysed. Finally, observations of unfolding events (such as meetings) were undertaken for a comparison of policy and practice.

6.3.1 Pupil admissions

In this study, pupil admissions entailed decisions about the entry age and

⁸ Zero stood for 'Not at all', one for 'To a little extent', two for 'Average extent', three for 'High extent' and four for 'Total extent'.

transfer procedures from one school to another. Zimbabwe's *Education Act* (Government of Zimbabwe, 1996a) guides the enrolment of pupils. According to Section 4 (2) of the *Act*:

No child in Zimbabwe shall be refused admission to any school on the grounds of race, tribe, colour, religion, creed, place of origin, political opinion or the social status of his parents.

Section 10 says that every child of school-going age is entitled to be enrolled at the primary or secondary school nearest to where he/she is ordinarily resident, unless such school is fully enrolled. Where the school is fully enrolled (see Section 11), the head of that school must issue the child with a certificate to that fact. This certificate is then used by the child to apply for enrolment at the next nearest school.

All five School heads reported that the national expectation was that a child would enter Grade One at the age of seven. Thus, the official primary school-going age (Grades 1-7) is 7-13 years and secondary school-going age (Forms 1-6) is 14-19 years. However, there is no policy strictly barring younger or older learners from entering the school system. The policy on repeating grades is that schools are discouraged from allowing repeaters. However, where both the parents and school find it necessary, it would be permissible provided the learner in question does not prevent any 'straight-run' candidate from having a place in the grade. A policy that discourages repeating is that government will not provide the school with the *per capita* grant for any learner repeating a grade.

With regard to pupil transfers, all the school heads reported that the policy was that a learner transferring from another school should produce a transfer letter signed and dated by the school head. The letter should give reasons for the transfer and summarise the conduct of the learner in question. The letter would also act as a clearance for this learner, that he/she does not owe the former school anything. Thus, decisions relating to pupil transfers were decentralised to the school level and school heads made such decisions.

All five school heads in the cluster reported that they had discretion to make final decisions regarding pupil admissions, either by way of delegation to staff members or doing it themselves. For example, despite the government's seven-year age requirement for Grade One, a school head could enrol a six-year old child into Grade One provided they were convinced that he/she was mentally and socially ready. Even though repeaters did not benefit schools financially, the school heads of the four smaller primary schools reported that repeaters were useful for boosting enrolment numbers, which in turn created a positive image of the institution. They confirmed that decisions to enrol or reject 'under age' learners or repeaters largely depended on the enrolment at hand. As reported in Chapter Five, the bigger the enrolment, the better the status of the school.

With regard to pupil admissions, the questionnaire asked teachers to indicate their perceptions of how decentralised decisions about two key issues, namely entry age, and transfers and other entry requirements, were made. In term of entry age, questionnaire responses from the 40 teachers who

responded show that seven (17.5 percent) reported there was no decentralisation at all to the school level, another seven (17.5 percent) reported that the decision had been devolved to schools to a little extent, and yet another seven reported average decentralisation. By contrast, 12 (30 percent) perceived there was high devolution to the school level and only seven teachers reported total decentralisation. On their involvement in decisions about entry age, 12 teachers (30 percent) perceived they had no involvement at all, another 12 perceived little involvement, six (15 percent) reported average extent, eight (20 percent) perceived high and only one (2.5 percent) teacher reported full involvement.

In relation to transfers and other entry requirements, eight teachers (20 percent) perceived no decentralisation to the school level, five (12.5 percent) perceived little extent, eight (20 percent) reported average extent, while another eight saw high extent and eleven (27.5 percent) reported total extent. With regard to their involvement in deciding on entry requirements, 19 of the 40 teachers (47.5 percent) perceived that they were not involved at all, five (12.5 percent) reported little involvement, and only six (15 percent) perceived average participation. Of those who reported some significant level of the involvement of teachers in this regard, only five reported that they felt involved to a high extent while two (5 percent) reported total involvement.

Aggregated statistics⁹ show that 34.7 percent of the respondent teachers

⁹ 0-1 means 'not at all to little extent'; 2 means 'average extent'; 3-4 means 'high to total extent'.

perceived the devolution of decisions about pupil admissions to the school level ranged from no to little involvement. A larger percentage regarded such devolution as ranging from average (18.7 percent) to total devolution (47.5 percent). However, regarding the extent to which they felt involved in deciding matters of pupil admission, 60 percent of the teachers reported that they were either not involved at all or they participated only to a little extent. Only 15 percent reported average involvement while 20 percent experienced high to total involvement in such decision-making.

Overall, teachers' responses seem to suggest that even though almost 50 percent of them perceived a high extent of decentralisation of decision-making to the school level, they were not significantly involved in making pupil admission decisions. Therefore, although decentralisation to the school has ostensibly been adopted in this area of decision-making, half of the teachers did not feel that decentralisation had occurred. In addition, only 35 percent of the teachers felt that they were involved in making decisions relating to pupil admission in their schools.

Interviews with teachers across the cluster revealed perceptions that school heads were pre-occupied with boosting enrolments, to the extent that they would enrol any applicant who came their way without involving staff in such decisions. Commenting on pupil transfer procedures, one teacher wrote:

According to the standing rules, a child transferring from another school should not be admitted without a transfer letter, but this regulation is often ignored because school heads want to boost their enrolments as much as possible.

Except for the school head of Mishi Primary i.e. the largest of the selected schools, the school heads of the four smaller schools reported that they were working hard to boost their enrolments. Therefore, they welcomed transfers from other schools. All of them confirmed that it was illegal to enrol a pupil without a transfer letter but, in practice, the situation on the ground was different. Expanding on this matter, one of the four school heads said:

We compete for pupils, so school heads tend to discourage transfers from their schools by refusing to write transfer letters for those cases they think are not genuine. Eventually, some children pitch up at new schools without any letters. In such cases, I usually accept them and seek their clearances later.

Interviews with parent members of School Development Committees (SDCs) across the cluster suggest that they perceived their role to be one of making sure that their schools did not charge exorbitant fees, which would scare away parents from enrolling their child at the school. Otherwise the parent members did not make any specific decisions pertaining to pupil admissions. They were merely informed by school heads about the arrival of new learners and where they came from, for which they were also happy because it meant more revenue to the school by way of fees and levies. The parents were adamant that pupil admissions was an area of decision-making that belonged to the school head and teaching staff.

The findings just reported suggest that all the stakeholders consulted perceived substantial devolution of decision-making to the school level, in regard to pupil admissions. However, while SDCs members perceived there was teacher involvement in such decisions, teachers themselves felt that they were not involved on the whole. It appears that school heads monopolise

decision-making in this area. Their monopoly seems to be centred on the desire to boost enrolments, since school heads apparently would benefit from such increases and the attendant advantage in school image, more than any other stakeholder. However, the nature of pupil admissions is likely to influence greatly the success or failure of subsequent teaching processes in the institution. Thus, the apparent lack of involvement of teachers in such decisions ignores the value they might add to this process. This suggests further that there are different understandings between teachers, school heads and parent governors about the utilisation of decentralised decision-making power.

While one feature of a decentralised system of school governance is shared decision-making among stakeholders, my findings suggest that in Chikanda cluster, in making decisions about pupil admissions, there is no evidence of sharing. The findings also show that decentralised decision-making authority can be re-centralised within a school structure. In this case, decision-making authority was centralised at the level of the school head. This confirms the theory of the locus of decentralised decision-making power, which suggests that decentralised decision-making power may be located in one of three stakeholder groupings: the administrators (administrative control), the teachers (professional control), or the parents (community control) (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Murphy & Beck, 1995). The SDCs seemed to accept such centralisation as the norm. This suggests that there is a limited scope in the school matters in which SDCs engage. This raises questions about the democratisation of school governance and the capacity of all stakeholders to

function effectively in a decentralised system of governance.

While the idea of a cluster was one of cooperation as opposed to competition, the decision-making area of pupil admissions presents a scenario of competition rather than cooperation. The five schools were not operating as a cluster in this regard. Such competition is likely to inhibit cooperation in other cluster activities. The notion of 'the bigger, the better', in terms of school enrolments, assumes centre stage in how schools conduct their business, and this yields stiff competition over 'clients'.

6.3.2 School organisation

The second area of decision-making investigated was school organisation. This area encompasses decisions about administration structure, timetabling, and class size. Interviews with school heads and my analysis of documents revealed that school organisation in this cluster (and others in the country) is informed by a number of policies. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture prescribed a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 in primary schools. Thus, the number of teaching staff members is determined by the enrolment. Similarly, the size of the teaching force determines the number of permanent management positions in the school and the status of such positions. To illustrate, a school with 15 or more teachers (i.e. an enrolment of 600 learners) may have a non-teaching school head and a permanent deputy school head post. The head of a school with less than 15 teachers is required to teach a full class, in addition to administrative duties. The head appoints one of the senior teachers to act as the deputy, but this is on a non-

permanent basis. The administrative hierarchy for primary schools is as follows, in the order of seniority: school head, deputy head, senior teacher (responsible for Grades 4-7 and also third in the line of command), teacher-in-charge of lower Grades (1-3), the ordinary classroom teacher, head girl, head boy, prefects and the rest of the pupils. The school head appoints teachers to their posts of responsibility. In addition, every school is required to have a School Development Committee as described in Chapter One. In Chikanda cluster, only Mishi Primary had more than 600 learners.

Within each of the five schools studied, there was a teacher responsible for coordinating cluster activities. This teacher was the link person between the cluster coordinating committee and the school. He/she would attend relevant cluster meetings on behalf of the school. Interviews with these teachers revealed that they did not form part of the administration structures at their schools. They only facilitated staff development functions as sponsored by the cluster. This is consistent with the role of the Better Schools Programme as reported earlier.

In timetabling the curriculum, all primary schools in Zimbabwe teach the same core subjects, with each being allocated a specific number of 30-minute periods per week. For example, languages (Shona/Ndebele and English) are allocated the greatest time on the timetable, i.e. 12 lessons, followed by Mathematics with eight lessons, and so on. Schools design their own timetables in tandem with the policy stipulations.

In the matter of class size, school heads in the Chikanda cluster confirmed that the teacher-pupil ratio, quoted above, was the official position of the Ministry. They reported that this ratio was not always possible in every class. It was permissible for a class to have slightly less or more, as long as the overall school enrolment and staff complement met the required overall ratios.

Interviews with the school heads seemed to reveal contradictions in the way school policy was experienced. School heads reported that they enjoyed some autonomy in the way they organised their own schools. For example, they made the final decisions in the appointment of teachers into posts of responsibility. Nevertheless, they felt constrained with the current policies on school organisation. All of the four teaching school heads reported that it was overly demanding for them to fulfil both teaching and management functions. As a result, both functions tended to suffer. Teachers reported that teaching heads often asked them to 'baby sit' their classes while they attended to other business, with a negative knock-on effect on the teachers' other classes.

Questionnaire responses show that in the sub-area of school administration structures, out of the 40 respondent teachers, ten (25 percent) perceived no decentralisation at all to the school level, while 12 (30 percent) reported a little extent, and only two (5 percent) perceived average devolution. Of those who perceived some significant devolution of power over the administration structure to the school level, only ten (25 percent) reported high and six (15 percent) reported total decentralisation of decision-making power. Similarly, on their involvement in making decisions in this sub-area, 19 (47.5 percent)

reported no involvement at all, nine (22.5 percent) indicated little participation, with six (15 percent) and another six reporting high and total involvement respectively.

In relation to class size, 15 (37.5 percent) teachers perceived no decentralisation at all to the school level, while 11 (27.5 percent) reported decentralisation to a little extent, and five reported an average extent of decentralisation. Only five (12.5 percent) perceived high extent of decentralisation, while only three (7.5 percent) perceived total decentralisation to the school level. However, with regard to their involvement in deciding class size, 21 (52.5 percent) of the teachers reported that they perceived they had no involvement at all. Seven (17.5 percent) perceived little involvement, five reported average, six reported high and another six, total involvement.

The third and last sub-item under school organisation was timetabling. Out of the 40 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, four (10 percent) reported no decentralisation at all to the school level. Five (12.5 percent) reported little extent. Four perceived average decentralisation to the school level. However, ten (25 percent) reported high decentralisation of powers, while 16 (40 percent) perceived full decentralisation of decision-making to the school level. In relation to their involvement in deciding on timetabling, 11 (27.5 percent) teachers reported no involvement at all. Six (15 percent) perceived little involvement, five (12.5 percent) reported average participation, 12 (30 percent) perceived high involvement and six indicated full involvement.

Overall, the questionnaire responses suggest that teachers perceived some significant decentralisation of decision-making to the school level in this area. This is evidenced by 41.2 percent of them who report high to total decentralisation in the area. However, an equally significant number of teachers felt that decisions in this area are not decentralised at all. This is evidenced by 45 percent of them who perceived little to no decentralisation at all. This significant difference of opinion may mean that some educators understand decentralised decision-making authority only within the constraints of existing policy frameworks, while others may see it as entailing the revision of those regulatory frameworks. Again, most teachers (58.7 percent) felt that they are not involved in making decisions to do with school organisation.

The apparent lack of teacher involvement in decisions about how schools are organised is further evidenced by their added comments in response to the questionnaire. One respondent wrote: 'We are just sent circulars that tell us everything'. Another elaborated, as follows:

The number of subjects is decided for us and there is no room for alteration. The school can only arrange the teaching periods but they are also governed by the time provided for each subject. This also comes from the top.

Responding to the question on decisions about class size, one respondent indicated that:

A teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40 is stipulated by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture. Heads can be charged if the number of teachers does not tally with the number of pupils on the ground.

Charts displayed in school heads' offices showed that the schools were

organised into various sub-committees such as sports, grounds, subject clusters, and so on. These sub-committees varied in nature from school to school. However, what seemed common was the absence of parent SDC members in these structures. School heads reported that SDC parent members were too busy to be able to participate in such sub-structures. Interviews with SDCs in all the schools showed that they seemed content with school staff deciding on matters of school organisation.

All the five schools' timetables were almost identical, reflecting the prescribed time allocations per subject. Extra-curricula activities, such as sports and school maintenance, tended to be the same throughout the schools. Both teachers and school heads reported that similar timetables were necessary to facilitate cluster workshops, sports competitions and shows. More importantly, at the end of Grade 7 pupils sit for a national examination, and the results from this examination are used for entry selection at most secondary schools.

A number of issues regarding decentralised school governance seem to emerge from these findings. While the presence of authority to make decisions is one of the key features of decentralised school governance, the schools studied did not seem to have such power over their organisation. Administrative structures, time allocations and class size are prescribed at ministerial level. Local conditions did not seem to be taken into serious consideration in those prescriptions. On the one hand, it seems sensible for government to stipulate teacher-pupil ratios, given the need to achieve cost-effectiveness through maximum utilisation of resources. On the other, if

schools have no authority to organise themselves, the sense of ownership and self-determination that seems to be necessary in a decentralised system may not be realised. Findings show that there is greater attention, on the part of government through its policies, to achieve uniformity in school organisation. This is at the expense of allowing individual schools to determine what was best suited to their conditions. Thus, the centralisation tendency on the part of the higher tiers of the education system is one of the factors hindering effective decentralisation in the cluster in Zimbabwe.

While the involvement of various stakeholders in decision-making is another important feature of decentralised school governance, teachers seem to lack involvement even for decisions that are made locally. Again, there appear to be different perceptions among teachers and school heads in this regard, with the latter perceiving greater teacher participation than the former. Findings consistently reveal decisional deprivation on the part of the teacher and satisfaction on the part of the parent governor, despite the latter's insignificant participation in decision-making. Thus, as organisations, schools are made up of different groups with competing interests. Inadequate dialogue among the stakeholders may not only yield a barrier to successful decentralisation, but also be a potential source of conflict.

The similarity in the five schools' timetables seemed to be an important enabler to cooperation within the cluster. It provided fertile ground from which common issues for staff development in the cluster could be developed. The extent to which this opportunity was utilised is discussed later in this chapter.

Here, suffice to say that central control of certain decisions by the higher tiers of a system may be utilised to make decentralised decisions. However, in the context of the same timetables and other organisation structures, schools may not be able to pay attention to specific contextual factors relevant to them.

6.3.3 Curriculum

In this study, the decisional area of curriculum encompassed four issues: lesson planning and scheming; instructional methods; selection of textbooks and pupil assessment. At the policy level, as reported in the preceding section, all the public primary schools in Zimbabwe follow a common curriculum. According to the Secretary of Education's *Circular Number 3* (Ministry of Education Sports and Culture. Provincial Education Director, 2000), the primary school curriculum is broadly made up of the following learning areas: Language and Communication; Numeracy; Science and Technology; Ethics and Citizenship; and Practical Subjects. Syllabi are nationally produced and distributed to schools. Although the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture approves and shortlists textbooks, schools are free to select titles from the approved lists of textbooks. As mentioned above, at the end of Grade 7, pupils sit for a national examination, whose results most secondary schools use to select pupils for entry into Form 1. While this examination and selection process has a bearing on the way the curriculum is implemented at primary schools, instructional methods, planning and scheming, and formative assessment procedures are not nationally prescribed.

Interviews with the school heads suggest that they were convinced that schools made substantial decisions about the curriculum. All of them kept records of their supervision visits to teachers' classes. Such visits centred on teachers' lesson preparation, the actual teaching and pupil assessment. On selection of textbooks, all the school heads reported that they allowed relevant teachers to do this, although the process was hampered by a lack of funds. On the role of the cluster in curriculum issues, one school head had this to say:

The few workshops that we are able to hold in this cluster are centred on the curriculum. Issues to do with the teaching of specific subjects and the use of appropriate methods are important to us. At the end of the day, we are measured through examination results.

As the most important levers of curriculum implementation, teachers were regarded as a significant source of data for this question of curriculum decision-making. In this regard, the teachers' questionnaire sought their perceptions regarding the extent that decisions about curriculum issues are decentralised to the school level, as well as the extent of teacher involvement in making such decisions. In relation to lesson planning and scheming, five teachers (12.5 percent) perceived no decentralisation at all to the school level, while seven (17.5 percent) perceived a little decentralisation and six (15 percent) reported average decentralisation. Of those who reported significant decentralisation of lesson planning decision-making powers to the school level, 11 (27.5 percent) indicated high decentralisation and 12 (30 percent) perceived there was a total decentralisation. In relation to their involvement in making decisions about lesson planning, four teachers (10 percent) reported no involvement at all, while seven (12.5 percent) perceived there was little

participation in decision-making, and another four (10 percent) reported a total involvement. Of those who perceived some substantial involvement, 12 (30 percent) reported high involvement, while 13 (32.5 percent) perceived a full involvement. This was, predictably, a higher combined percentage (62.5 percent) than those who experienced little or no involvement. Considering that teachers are an important lever for curriculum implementation, including lesson planning, the evidence that a total of 37.5 percent of teacher respondents in this study felt that they were not involved in making decisions about lesson planning is cause for concern. This may have implications for decentralised school governance, as well as for effective teaching and learning. Chapter Seven returns to this issue in more detail.

Another aspect of the curriculum examined was instructional methods. In this regard, three teachers (7.5 percent) reported no decentralisation at all to the school level, while four (10 percent) of them perceived little such decentralisation, and another four indicated average decentralisation. On the positive side, 13 (32.5 percent) teachers reported high decentralisation, while 15 (37.5 percent) of them perceived a full decentralisation to the school level. With regard to their involvement in making decisions in this area, one teacher perceived no involvement at all, seven (17.5 percent) reported little involvement, and eight (20 percent) perceived average participation. Of those 24 teachers who reported significant involvement, eight (20 percent) reported high involvement, while the remaining 16 (40 percent) perceived full involvement on their part. Again, reasons for the negative perceptions and understandings by some teachers regarding their roles and participation in

this regard are cause for worry, and need to be examined in relation to effective decentralisation of school governance in general, and effective teaching and learning in particular.

Regarding the selection of textbooks, six (15 percent) teachers reported no decentralisation at all to the school level, while seven of them perceived a little and another seven reported average decentralisation. Eleven teachers (27.5 percent) indicated high decentralisation while eight (20 percent) perceived a total extent. When asked to comment on their involvement in actual decision-making, five (12.5 percent) teachers reported no decisional involvement at all, while eight (20 percent) perceived a little involvement and 11 (27.5 percent) reported they had average participation. On the positive side, ten (25 percent) teachers perceived high participation and six (15 percent) reported total involvement.

With reference to the last sub-area under curriculum, i.e. assessment of pupils, four (10 percent) teachers reported there was little decentralisation of decision-making to the school level, while three (7.5 percent) perceived an average of such decentralisation. Nineteen (47.5 percent) teachers reported a high decentralisation and 14 (35 percent) perceived a total decentralisation of decision-making to the school level. Regarding teacher involvement in deciding matters to do with pupil assessment, one teacher reported no involvement at all, while three teachers perceived there was little participation and another three indicated an average level of involvement. Fifteen (37.5 percent) teachers reported a high involvement and 18 (45 percent) perceived

a total involvement in decision-making in this sub-area.

Overall, the majority (64.3 percent) of teachers I consulted perceived there was a high extent of decentralised curriculum decision-making to the school level. Similarly, in relation to their involvement in decision-making in the area, the majority (61.5 percent) perceived they had a high involvement. However, it is still a major concern that not all teachers felt that decisions about the curriculum are made at the school level and that they, as implementers of such curricula, are not fully involved in making decisions about such issues in their schools.

Focus group interviews with teachers, and analyses of added comments they gave in answer to the questionnaire, shed more light on a number of issues around the curriculum. For example, most teachers reported severe shortages of textbooks. They reported that this adversely affected the instructional methods they could bring to bear on their teaching. Lamenting the lack of choice he/she experienced, one teacher simply wrote: 'No funds, no choice'. Another respondent expanded on this issue and reported that selecting textbooks from a range of them was a luxury in their case because the school did not have funds to purchase books in the first instance. Instead, this respondent added, only one or two copies of the cheapest book on the market would be bought.

The Zimbabwean education system is still strongly examination-oriented. To illustrate, admission into a highly respected secondary school requires a first

class pass in the Grade 7 national examinations. Thus, it is reported that instructional methods, selection of textbooks, assessment of pupils and lesson planning, tend to be more examination-driven than otherwise. For example, teachers reported that for many years, the Grade 7 examination was 100 percent multiple-choice type questions. As a result, teachers tended to structure all their assessment of pupils along this line, even as early as Grade 3. However, as from 2003, the examination has become multi-mode and even includes essay writing. Teachers reported that this shift demands that pupils have access to reading materials and the schools do not have these.

Interviews with School Development Committee (SDC) members revealed that they did not make any decisions to do with the curriculum. On this matter, one SDC member, speaking on behalf of his committee, reported:

We leave what goes on in the classroom to the teacher. Unless teachers invite us for something, we trust that, as people who are trained in the profession, they know what is to be done.

This response prompted me to interrogate the SDCs further about their role, if any, in the curriculum. I sought to determine whether parents had opportunities to dialogue with teachers about what their children learned and how they performed on an individual basis. Minutes of parents' meetings showed that the primary goal of such gatherings was to deliberate over issues of finance and school buildings. This is confirmed by what is reported of Boka Primary in Chapter Five. Parents at Boka Primary put the completion of a classroom block high as their priority for 2004, despite the fact that on completion, the building would be a white elephant. This was linked to the school's low enrolment, which did not require additional classrooms, neither in

2004, nor in the following few years. This finding about the dialogue focus at parents' meetings suggests that SDCs' understanding of decentralised school governance is limited. Not only was this the case, teachers' and school heads' understandings of the role of SDCs seemed equally restricted to infrastructural issues. This raises the question whether the role of a parent governor has grown any further and different from what it was before decentralisation gained currency in Zimbabwe.

Both school heads and teachers interviewed reported that they were keen to interact with parents about the curriculum, but most parents tended to shy away from this. However, with the exception of one school, school plans did not reflect set dates for 'open days' when parents could meet teachers about their children's learning. Thus, the reported school heads' and teachers' willingness to engage parents in this area had not translated into plans and action.

It appeared also that the lack of parental involvement in curriculum issues was not a matter of parents being unwilling to participate but was, more importantly, about what they were able to contribute. On this, one parent interviewed explained:

If teachers tell us how they want parents to help, we can try. Some of us are afraid to end up confusing the child, because we are not trained. So far, we as parents are not doing much.

Similarly, one school head had the following to say:

We have parents of different capacity. Some parents can meaningfully contribute to teaching and learning, while others would have difficulties because they are not adequately literate. In

a number of cases also, parents have died and a distant relative who becomes the guardian is sometimes as distant to the school as he/she is to the child.

These findings show that decentralisation of curriculum decision-making is a complex process. In the eyes of most parents in the cluster, this area was best left to those who are competent to decide about it i.e. educators. This implies that parents in this cluster did not make any significant decisions regarding the core business of the school, namely, about the curriculum. This narrows, even further, the involvement of parents running schools in the cluster. The need for capacity building efforts cannot be over-emphasised in this case. Such efforts would widen the horizons of both educators and parents in terms of how they can collaborate more in school governance.

6.3.4 Financial resources

A fourth area of decision-making examined in this study involved three realms of decisions about financial resources in the school: the charging of fees and levies, budgeting, and other ways of raising funds (fundraising). At the policy level, two sections of the *Education Act* (Government of Zimbabwe, 1996a) guide school in charging fees and levies. Section six of the *Act* refers to the need for schools to charge minimum fees:

It is the objective that tuition in schools in Zimbabwe be provided for the lowest possible fees consistent with the maintenance of high standards of education, and the Minister shall encourage the attainment of this objective by every appropriate means, including the making of grants and other subsidies to schools.

Section 21 stipulates that the Secretary, i.e. the head of the Ministry, shall prescribe maximum amounts of fees and levies. No responsible authority shall

increase any fee or levy by more than the prescribed amount or percentage in any period of twelve months unless the Secretary has approved it. An authority wishing the approval of such a fee or levy increase may submit a written application to the Secretary setting out the full details of the proposed increase and the rationale for it.

With regard to other ways of generating funds, SDCs are empowered to do so by *Statutory Instrument 87* (Government of Zimbabwe, 1992). According to item 5 (c) of *Instrument 87*, in exercising its functions, SDCs have power to:

...borrow money on such terms and conditions as the committee considers expedient and to receive grants and donations, whether from parents of pupils at the school or from other persons.

All the school heads in the cluster confirmed that the issue of money was at the centre of school-parent relationships. They all shared the same experience that parents were the key role players in all matters relating to school finances. Emphasising how important parents considered financial matters to be in their interaction with him, one school head reported:

In the eyes of most parents, the quality of a school head is largely measured through his/her financial management abilities.

This is understandable, given the central role of financial resources in any enterprise and the low economic status of the communities in question. Other responses from school heads regarding financial resources are presented later in this section as they are closely linked to responses from teachers and parents.

From the teachers' questionnaire responses regarding the charging of fees and levies, eight (20 percent) reported no decentralisation of decision-making to the school level, while 11 (27.5 percent) perceived little such decentralisation and seven (17.5 percent) said they perceived there was an average devolution. Of those who reported significant devolution to the school level, six (15 percent) teachers reported high devolution and seven (17.5 percent) indicated total decentralisation. With regard to their involvement in making of decisions about the charging of fees and levies, 24 (60 percent) teachers said that they were not involved at all. Eight (20 percent) teachers reported little involvement, five (12.5 percent) deemed it to be average, and three said they had a high participation in decision-making.

Regarding budgeting, eight of the 40 teachers reported no decentralisation at all to the school level, while four perceived little, and five reported average devolution. Eleven teachers perceived high decentralisation to the school level and 13 respondents reported total decentralisation. In terms of their involvement in deciding on budgetary matters, 21 (52.5 percent) teachers perceived no involvement at all. Ten (25 percent) of them reported little involvement. Two teachers perceived high involvement and six of them reported total involvement.

On decisions about fundraising, six (15 percent) teachers reported no decentralisation of decision-making at all to the school level, while three (7.5 percent) teachers reported little such decentralisation and four (10 percent) of them perceived an average decentralisation. Fifteen (37.5 percent) teachers

indicated a high decentralisation and 12 (30 percent) perceived a total decentralisation to the school level. In relation to the extent to which they were involved in decisions about fund raising, nine (22.5 percent) teachers perceived no involvement at all. Four (10 percent) teachers reported little involvement and eight (20 percent) of them indicated average participation. Conversely, 12 (30 percent) teachers perceived high involvement and seven (17.5 percent) reported total involvement.

Overall, the questionnaire responses show that more than half (53.3 percent) of the surveyed teachers perceived high to total decentralisation of decisions about school financial resources to the school level. However, the majority (63.3 percent) of the respondents reported no to little involvement in making decisions in this area.

Explaining this distribution of responses, teachers commented that the SDC, parents and the school administration decided on finances in the school. One teacher elaborated:

Government leaves this to the school and its SDC. It's not even aware of the fees and levies charged and does not follow up or audit.

As reported in Chapter One, one teacher from each school serves as a member of the SDC. However, the sentiments expressed in teachers' responses above indicate that, to them, even that representation did not seem to have any impact to their favour. In the interviews I conducted with teachers, most of them felt that they were not adequately consulted prior to decisions on financial matters being made. One of them added:

It is more of being told what has been decided than us being involved in decision-making. Even our representative in the committee has little say in there. Decisions are monopolised by parents, because they say they are the source of school funds.

Shedding more light on the level of teacher involvement in deciding matters of finance, a teacher-representative of one SDC reported:

It is a very sensitive area. To some parents, too much involvement on our part as teachers would be construed as wanting to embezzle school funds. Our levels of understanding of issues are different. Because most parents are not knowledgeable, and also because funds have been misappropriated before in this school, there tends to be suspicion on the part of parents. Thus the safe thing to do is to allow them to make the decisions.

Confirming the teachers' views on the involvement of the latter in decision-making on school finances, all the school heads were adamant that they consulted teachers as much as possible. However, they emphasised that, because parents were the main source of revenue for schools and because they were legally empowered to run school finances, they were the key decision-makers in this regard.

Similarly, interviews with SDC parent members in the cluster showed that to them, decisions on school finances constituted the core of their business as parents' representatives. One SDC chairperson reported:

Our major roles as the SDC are to charge fees in consultation with parents and to construct school buildings. In today's meeting for example, we are discussing the progress in completing that new classroom block you see in the middle.

The collection of revenue and expending such funds in the interest of the school were confirmed by all the other SDCs in the cluster as the core business of these committees. Emphasising the SDC's key role as that of

being the custodians of school funds, the councillor of Boka Primary had this to say:

Parents expect the SDC to look after school funds well. They must be able to accurately and convincingly report back to parents how money has been used. Parents are willing to pay all the fees and levies if the use of money is transparent.

Minutes of SDC meetings at all five schools confirmed that their deliberations centred on school funds and the use made of such funds. However, apart from isolated cases of applications for donor funding, there were no other forms of fund-raising reported in the five schools.

These findings suggest that although the schools were required to operate within the government-stipulated fee limits, decisions about the generation and utilisation of funds were largely decentralised to the school level. Unlike in the preceding areas of pupil admissions, school organisation and curriculum, in which parent representatives were passive, in decisions about school finance, the parent representative is the most active stakeholder and final decision-maker.

While shared decision-making is one of the key features of decentralised school governance, in this cluster it was not the case regarding school finances. My findings show that while decision-making for this area of governance was decentralised to the school level, the decentralisation was experienced differently among the key stakeholders. Decisions were centralised within the parent stakeholder, with the teacher being the most deprived constituency. This was another instance of local centralisation of a

nationally decentralised power. Lack of shared decision-making practices is likely to result in disgruntlement among stakeholders (such as teachers) who are left out, and thereby negatively impacting on efforts to decentralise school governance. The involvement of more players in decisions about school finances might widen the scope of decision-making in this area, which, as reported above, tends to be restricted to collecting revenue from one source, namely the parent.

The limited scope of parental involvement in school affairs, reported in most sections above, can partly be attributed to the history of educational financing in the early years of independence in the country. The declaration of free education, as alluded to in Chapter One, entailed government footing the entire education bill, including buying textbooks and other learning materials for all pupils, through the per capita grant. Although government continues to pay this grant, the amount is inadequate, as reported earlier. Therefore, government is meeting its obligation legally but, in practical terms, schools have to raise most of their required funds. In Chikanda cluster, parents in general and parent governors in particular, did not understand this scenario fully. While school heads and teachers had a better understanding of it, the low economic status of local communities and the fragility of parent-school relationships in some cases, did not allow schools to place a greater demand for funds on parents.

One major issue emerging throughout this discussion thus far is that the stakeholders' understandings and experiences of decentralised school

governance are significantly different. This issue is developed further in Chapter Seven.

6.3.5 Human resources

In the area of human resources, the study investigated decentralised decision-making in three aspects: the hiring and firing of teaching staff, staff development and staff appraisal. First, the policy regarding the employment of all civil servants in Zimbabwe, including all teachers in public schools, is that the Public Service Commission is the mother employer. The Commission operates through various ministries, which hire staff on its behalf. At the time of this study, authority to hire teachers had been shifted away from schools, where it had been devolved previously, and assigned to provincial offices of education. I describe this shift in greater detail in the appropriate section below. The Commission finalises the firing of teachers, through recommendations from the Education Ministry.

In relation to the staff development of teachers, all public schools have been grouped into clusters. As described in Chapter One, a cluster is a group of five or six neighbouring schools that have agreed to work together by way of sharing resources in order to improve their effectiveness. Thus, clusters are staff development agencies. Chikanda, the cluster studied in this inquiry, represents one such grouping of schools. In addition, provincial and district education officials, as well as individual schools, are expected to conduct staff development activities as they see fit.

The policy on staff appraisal is that supervisors and supervisees (heads and teachers respectively, in this case) should discuss, agree and sign annual work plans. There are two performance reviews each year. Results of appraisals are to be copied to the supervisee, the district, provincial and head offices, and the head office sends the report to the Ministry of the Public Service. Training is meant to be ongoing for all staff in the service and a must for new appointees. A performance audit team monitors the training process. Thus, the entire performance management system is founded on the spirit of empowerment and the building of trust between supervisors and supervisees.

Interviews with the school heads in the cluster revealed that the employment of teaching staff was an area experiencing re-centralisation. By this I mean that devolved decision-making authority was being re-possessioned by officials at higher tiers of the education system. One school head had the following to say about this repossession of responsibility:

In 2001, schools were authorised to hire teachers. We worked through a committee comprising parents' representatives, selected senior teachers, the head and the deputy head of the school. However, after one term, we were told to discontinue the practice with immediate effect. The job was now going to be done by District officials.

When asked why the authority to hire staff was withdrawn from schools, the school head reported:

The staff selection committees were accused of corruption. We were accused of employing our own relatives. We know, however, that people in higher offices discovered that they had lost a big power base, so they decided to reverse the whole thing.

Concurring with this school head's view, as well as adding another dimension to the debate, another school head stated that:

The idea of localised selection of staff was very noble, but the powers that be, realised that we would be more powerful than them, so they would not buy that. However, politically, we are now safer because we can no longer be accused of favouritism and nepotism.

I also asked teachers and school heads about schools' capacity to effectively recruit teaching staff. Most respondents reported a high deficit in the necessary capacity. They indicated that processes of short-listing and interviewing candidates were demanding if they were done properly. Some argued that it was disempowering to ask people to perform such responsibilities without adequately preparing those who would be tasked to perform that function. Most interviewees, however, felt that the way forward was not to exclude schools and their communities totally from the hiring process, but to first build capacity in the stakeholders.

Lamenting schools' lack of decision-making authority in the employment of teachers, and the attendant downstream effects, yet another school head reported:

We have just been sent an additional teacher, but we are over-staffed already. We have been frantically looking for additional pupils to boost our enrolment and maintain the current staff numbers, now they send us another one. Worse still, they give us another lady teacher, when we need a male. There are only two males here, out of a staff of eleven.

In pursuance of the apparent reversal of the decentralisation trend, I interviewed the District Education Officer (DEO) with a view to seeking,

among other things, reasons for the re-centralisation of decision-making in relation to the recruitment and appointment of staff. He explained:

First, the capacity of school committees to recruit teachers in a transparent manner, particularly in rural areas, was very suspect. Second, there were many reports of corruption on the part of school heads and their SDCs. They lacked the necessary professionalism that goes with this task. And third, because of poor communication, again particularly in rural areas, the method had become unduly expensive to the prospective teachers who had to travel from school to school. We had to protect the image of the ministry.

To complete the picture, in the Provincial office, I interviewed the Deputy Provincial Education Director (DPED), who echoed the sentiments of the DEO more bluntly and alluded to bribes taking place:

The employment of teachers was withdrawn from schools because of corruption. The heads were selling vacancies. The image of the Ministry and Government was at stake. We received the same outcry at district level. Also, the process was expensive for job seekers.

The DPED confirmed that the employment of teachers was now centralised under the Provincial Office and the District Education Office could only recruit temporary teachers. As my interview with the DPED went on, I observed that a long queue of job-seeking teachers had grown and they waited impatiently to see this official. It is likely that most of these young men and women had come from rural areas in the seven districts of the province to see the DPED. However, since the DPED was not the staffing officer I sought to know why the queue was at the DPED's door. His response was that: 'Those matters which the staffing officer cannot handle are referred to me'. Thus, it appeared that even at the provincial level, the employment of staff continued the climb up a re-centralisation ladder. Therefore, the dilemma is that decentralisation

tends to open the door to undue influence among school heads as well as 'the community'.

In an attempt to counter such practices of undue influence, central government is often left with no option other than to limit the scope of decentralisation. This scenario poses a contradiction that bedevils decentralisation policies. Within the contradiction, this study's findings suggest that the understandings and experiences of decentralisation of stakeholders at school and cluster levels tend to differ from those in higher tiers of the system. On one hand, those at school level understand decentralisation as permanent empowerment of the grassroots, while those in the higher tiers of government tend to view it as mere delegation of duties and responsibilities, which they can withdraw at any time from the delegated officers. This poses a strong threat against devolution of power in the education sector.

With regard to staff development, all the school heads in the cluster reported that individual schools and clusters had authority and were expected to design and run their own staff development activities, in addition to those conducted by district or provincial officials. In all the five schools, documented action plans showed staff development as one of the main items on the agendas. Examples of staff development issues included in those action plans were: keeping teachers abreast with new knowledge, such as information technology; syllabus interpretation courses; and teaching specific subjects. The Cluster Resource Teacher reported that the main function of the cluster was to develop staff in all spheres of their work. He added:

Apart from workshops on the teaching of specific subjects, we have coaching clinics for less popular games like volleyball and tennis. We also have plans to tackle topics like teachers' conditions of service.

Thus, decision-making about staff development was significantly devolved to the cluster and school levels. The extent to which staff development successfully occurred at these levels is discussed in section 6.4 below.

With regard to staff appraisal, the school heads confirmed the policy, as described above. However, they reported that performance appraisal was not proceeding as planned. One reason was that while the system was designed to reward good performers through promotion and salary advancements, and to assist poor performers to improve, such monetary rewards were not forthcoming from the employer. Also, the lack of adequate teaching resources in most schools undermined an objective assessment of teacher performance. Against this background, the school heads reported that the little performance appraisal they did was inspecting teachers' record-keeping and assessing their teaching. They also reported that the SDCs do not play any role in decisions about the performance of teaching staff.

Regarding the hiring and firing of staff, from questionnaire responses, about 28 (70 percent) out of the 40 teachers reported no decentralisation at all to the school level while five (12.5 percent) teachers perceived little devolution, two (5 percent) reported average devolution, and three (7.5 percent) perceived total decentralisation. On their involvement in deciding matters of hiring and firing of staff, 35 (87.5 percent) of the 40 teachers reported no involvement at

all. Four (10 percent) teachers reported little involvement and one (2.5 percent) perceived high involvement in decision-making.

Regarding decisions about staff development, five (12.5 percent) teachers reported no devolution of decision-making at all to the school level, while eight (20 percent) perceived little decentralisation of decision-making to the school level and ten (25 percent) reported average devolution. Conversely, 10 (25 percent) teachers saw the situation as highly decentralised and six (15 percent) reported a total devolution of power.

In relation to teachers' involvement in making decisions around matters of staff development, ten (25 percent) teachers reported no involvement at all, while six (15 percent) of them perceived little participation and nine (22.5 percent) perceived average involvement. However, 12 (30 percent) reported high involvement and two (5 percent) teachers perceived total participation.

Regarding staff performance appraisal, six (15 percent) teachers perceived no decentralisation at all of decision-making to the school level, 10 (25 percent) of them reported there was little devolution, and four teachers (10 percent) indicated that there was average decentralisation. Conversely, 13 (32.5 percent) of the teachers reported high decentralisation and the remaining seven (17.5 percent) perceived a total devolution of these decisions.

With regard to their participation in decisions about staff appraisal, 15 (37.5 percent) out of the 40 teacher respondents perceived no involvement at all,

while five (12.5 percent) teachers reported little participation. Eight (20 percent) of them reported they had an average involvement. Equally, eight perceived they had a high involvement and two teachers reported they had total participation.

Overall, teachers' questionnaire responses show that more than half (51.6 percent) of the respondents perceived little to no decentralisation of decision-making to the school level regarding staff matters. Pertaining to their involvement in decision-making in this area, the majority (62.5 percent) of the teachers perceived no to very little involvement on their part. However, a closer look at the statistics shows that this overall picture was largely influenced by responses about the hiring and firing of staff, which recorded the least decentralisation and involvement. In the other two sub-areas namely, staff development and appraisal, respondents indicated significant devolution and involvement in decision-making.

In both the questionnaire and interview responses from teachers, the issue of hiring teachers attracted the greatest interest among the respondents because it is a contentious matter. They reported that this area was one in which schools suffered the greatest decisional deprivation. Commenting about the extent to which the school made decisions in this area, one teacher simply wrote: 'Not even an atom of that authority'.

Interviews with parent governors revealed that they played no part in staff matters. However, the parents at Boka Primary felt that, although they did not

recruit or appraise teaching staff, they had power to exert pressure on the Education Ministry to transfer an educator from their school. Expanding on this, the Boka SDC chairperson argued:

[The Ministry of Education] had to remove Mr [Gara] from being school head here after we visited every office, from district to provincial, complaining about his misuse of school funds.

The findings in the human resources area, as reported above, raise a few important issues about decentralisation of school governance. Where people have no adequate capacity to make certain decisions, it seems counter-productive and disempowering to grant them authority to make those decisions. This also implies that an education system should not devolve decision-making authority without prior diagnosis of the situation at the targeted level. On the other hand, re-centralisation is likely to be equally counter-productive and disempowering, because individual schools' unique staffing needs tend to suffer when decisions are made far away from the schools themselves. An example of this was reported above, when the school head of Boka complained of continually being sent female teachers when the school desperately needed males to balance its staff.

Without the necessary financial support, decentralised school governance is not likely to succeed. The failure to finance the staff appraisal system, as reported for this cluster, is a typical example. Therefore, my argument is that the shortcomings of central government (such as the failure to provide the necessary funds) constitute one inhibiting factor to decentralisation in the cluster. However, this study also investigated the capacity of stakeholders to function fruitfully in a decentralised system, to which the discussion now turns.

6.4 Stakeholders' capacity in decentralised school governance

As reported in Chapter One, the Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ) was created to play a pivotal role in the process of decentralising the running of education, namely, that of developing the necessary competences among education officers, school heads, teachers and parents. According to the BSPZ's handbook for *Training and support for teachers, heads and education officers: Module A: Information and awareness* (The Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe, 1995, p. 21):

Professional growth of the stakeholders will be organised in a participatory manner.... Increased accountability will be fostered at a local level with regard to professional growth and development.

From this we know that capacity building was extremely important, particularly for the decentralisation of school governance, because schools would make key decisions about themselves, as opposed to merely implementing decisions imposed from higher offices in the system. Also, there was a need to help school heads, teachers and parents to cope with shared decision-making, an important feature of decentralised school governance.

The BSPZ, which promotes school improvement, is implemented through the cluster system. As described in Chapter One, the nature of this system is that schools throughout the country are divided into groups, comprising a cluster of five or six schools each. The cluster has been positioned as the instrument for, and locus of, on-going staff development activities for teachers, school heads and parents. All other staff development activities that may be initiated by higher tiers of the education system (district, provincial and national) are

expected to complement cluster activities. Among other roles, clusters should: conduct needs analyses for teachers, school heads and their deputies, and SDCs; and formulate and implement annual training programmes based on identified needs (The Better Schools Programme (Zimbabwe), 2000).

Thus, in order to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of their capacities to function effectively in a decentralised system, this study examined stakeholders' views regarding the success and/or failure of the BSPZ as a capacity builder. This was achieved through using, as the unit of analysis, the extent to which the BSPZ objectives relevant to the study were being achieved for the stakeholders. Therefore, stakeholders' capacity to function effectively in a decentralised system was an indicator of the success or failure of the BSPZ as a capacity builder. The findings presented and discussed below are a result of a triangulation of data collection methods as described in Chapter Four i.e. a questionnaire to teachers, focus group interviews with teachers, interviews with school heads and SDCs, observations of events, and document analyses.

6.4.1 Developing school heads' management competences

The development of school heads' competences in school management is one of the objectives of the BSPZ. Such competences include planning, organising and coordinating school activities. In Chapter Three school governance is conceptualised as entailing policy formulation and oversight of the implementation of such policies. Thus, although this BSPZ objective refers to school management competences, the same are indeed some of the

necessary school governance capabilities. Again, as argued in Chapter Three, the principal is an important factor in the context of educational change.

While school heads need to be competent in these areas, the objective does not harness other stakeholders (such as teachers and SDCs) who, in the spirit of shared decision-making, need similar competences. As pointed out earlier, shared decision-making is an important characteristic of decentralised school governance. Therefore school management can no longer remain the monopoly of the school head. Thus, one of the barriers to successful decentralisation of school governance in the cluster may be the lack of adequate inclusion of all stakeholders in training programmes.

In relation to the school heads' views of the success of the BSPZ in developing decentralised school governance capacity among all stakeholders in the schools and cluster, the interviews with the five school heads revealed that this objective had not been achieved. The school heads reported that they did not feel they possessed adequate school management competences, let alone other stakeholders (such as teachers and parents). They reported, further, that from the time the donor wound up its funding of the BSPZ programme in 2002, staff development activities had dwindled drastically. Reportedly, the cluster had not been able to sustain the momentum set in the donor era. Cluster workshops were now few, to the extent that one school head asserted that the school heads in the cluster did not know each other well enough for their professional cooperation:

We do not meet often. As a result, there is not enough follow up to the issues we handle in the few workshops we have had. As a school head I cannot say the BSPZ is developing my competences enough.

Highlighting some of his training needs that had yet to be adequately addressed, one school head argued:

We need training in areas such as financial management, supervision of teachers, building school infrastructure, current issues like HIV/AIDS and so on. On paper, the BSPZ is very good, but it still lacks advocacy and practical activities, particularly in this cluster.

All the four teaching school heads in the cluster reported that they felt incompetent and needed training on how to cope with both teaching and school management, including such coping skills as time management. They argued that while their schools were small and expected to pose fewer management problems, they still had to attend to parents' and teachers' concerns as any other school head should and, in the process, their classes suffered.

Interviews with the school heads further revealed that even during the donor period, workshops tended to be sector-based as opposed to being inclusive, in that issues relating to school management tended to be directed towards school heads, while those relating to teaching were directed to teachers, and those relating to school finances, to parent governors. One school head explained:

Yes, we are aware that even the teacher needs to develop capacity in school management if we have to move forward. It's only that now the cluster system is weak, otherwise we should be doing that.

This apparent lack of inclusiveness in capacity building programmes as well as the evident dearth of staff development activities around school management issues, are anathema to decentralised school governance.

The school heads also reported that district and provincial officials sometimes held workshops with them to develop, among other things, school management competences. However, interviews with the school heads revealed that these workshops were not synchronised in any way with cluster staff development plans, and that such management workshops were targeted at school heads alone. Thus, local conditions as a context for change seemed to be ignored. School heads also reported that these workshops tended to be top-down in their approach, in the sense that it was the officials who decided on the topics, the timing and the venues. Thus, in this case, authority over developing management competence seems to be located in those who administer the education system (higher tier officers), and not in those who implement policies (school heads). All the heads were of the opinion that, although such workshops were very few and far between, they tended to value them more than cluster workshops, not because they were more useful, but because they provided them with an opportunity to interact with senior officials in the education system. This suggests an entrenched attitude characteristic of centralised systems described in the policy implementation dilemmas theory, which suggests that the centre (higher tiers of the education system) tends to perpetuate centralised control, and by so doing, those in the lower rungs of the system feel powerless and obliged to align themselves sheepishly to the centre (Smyth & van der Vegt, 1993). This

attitude is likely to be one of the major inhibitors to decentralised school governance.

In relation to teachers' perceptions regarding the extent to which the cluster was achieving the objective of developing school management competences, from the questionnaire¹⁰, responses show that of the 40 respondents, seven (17.5 percent) perceived no achievement at all for this objective. Eleven (27.5 percent) teachers reported that the objective was being achieved to a little extent. In comparison, 11 (27.5 percent) perceived average fulfilment, while seven (17.5 percent) reported high achievement and only four (10 percent) perceived total achievement.

Aggregated scores¹¹ show that 45 percent of the teachers consulted reported little to no achievement at all for this objective. Another 27.5 percent reported average achievement. The remainder (27.5 percent) perceived high to total achievement. Therefore it seems the majority of teachers did not think that stakeholders in their schools possessed sound school management competences necessary for effective decentralised school governance.

Interviews with teachers revealed that, like the teaching school heads, most of them did not cope with their share of school management responsibilities as well as teaching. In this regard, one teacher explained:

The school head tries to involve us in school management, but this means less time for our classes. The balance between the two is

¹⁰ The same rating scale as the one used in section 5.2 above was used here. 0 stands for 'Not at all', 1 for 'To a little extent', 2 for 'Average extent', 3 for 'High extent' and 4 for 'Total extent'.

¹¹ 0-1 means 'not at all to little extent', 2 means 'average extent', and 3-4 means 'high to total extent'.

difficult. Worse still, when teachers are assessed, the focus is on their teaching. This is the trend even with staff development workshops.

Concurring with this view, another teacher reported that the BSPZ's capacity building efforts around school management competences were not targeted at them.

The few workshops we hold in the cluster as teachers focus on teaching. School management issues are rather restricted to the administration (school heads and their deputies).

Both school heads' and teachers' views regarding the development of school management competences suggest that, not only was the BSPZ failing to achieve this objective, efforts towards achieving the goal were not holistic in approach, in that they were not inclusive of all the stakeholders, and this was negatively impacting on decentralisation.

In relation to parents' views of the success of the BSPZ in developing school management capacity among stakeholders, the interviews with parent governors in the cluster revealed that their understanding of school management capacity tended to be restricted to how school heads handled school finances. In the four schools (Mishi, Pfungi, Mari and Konde) where finances were reportedly to be properly managed, parent governors felt that the BSPZ was achieving the objective to develop management competences. At Boka Primary, where school funds had reportedly been mishandled previously, parent governors felt that it was only in the past 12 months after the change of the school head that they began to experience sound school management.

In tandem with teachers' responses above, records of staff development action plans for each of the five schools, as well as those of the cluster, focussed on the teacher and only on such needs as the teaching of specific subjects. They reflected nothing about school heads' staff development needs or about the needs of all stakeholders for decentralised school governance. This suggests that in most cases both teachers and school heads do not construe the latter stakeholder to be a candidate for staff development, and that they do not understand that parents and teachers have a role in school governance. My experience as a teacher in Zimbabwe confirms that this notion of staff development cuts across the entire education system, with each higher tier always believing that it is lower tiers that need development. This may explain why school heads in the study had low respect for the Cluster Resource Teacher, as discussed in section 6.4.2 below.

In an ideal decentralised school governance system, devolution of decisions would entail such areas as financial management, school organisation and human resource management. However, both teachers and school heads in the selected cluster perceived that they lacked adequate competence in these areas. To them, the cluster was not achieving its capacity building role. This was so despite decision-making authority having been decentralised to schools and their clusters in order to conduct their own staff development programmes. Thus, the findings suggest that school heads did not have the necessary capacity to function effectively in a decentralised system because of a combination of factors. The centralisation tendency on the part of the higher tiers of the education system results in inadequate support for cluster

staff development efforts. Also, the top-down notion of staff development creates a stereotype that sees no need for staff development efforts to be targeted at school heads.

6.4.2 The need for organisational structure

A second objective of the BSPZ is the establishment of a structure for continuous staff development and growth. Continuous staff growth in knowledge and skills, which also characterises effective organisations, is necessary for decentralised school governance. Such challenges as the sourcing of funds, management of new curricula developments, and shared decision-making, require continuous staff development. As such, this study investigated stakeholders' views regarding the extent to which the cluster in question fostered such development and continuous growth.

Interviews with the school heads in the cluster revealed that they did not perceive the BSPZ cluster structure to be sustaining continuous staff development. All the school heads believed that a cluster structure that has an ordinary teacher coordinating cluster activities was counter-productive. This was because school heads tended to disrespect such an arrangement, because teachers were their subordinates. As a result, school heads tended to view the cluster as an intervention for teachers and not stakeholders such as themselves. They argued, further, that because the Cluster Resource Teacher was a full-time classroom practitioner in a school, he/she was at the mercy of a school head in terms of having time to pursue cluster activities.

They suggested that appointing one of the school heads to lead the affairs of the cluster would turn around the fortunes of this cluster.

The idea of having a school head leading a cluster had been discouraged constantly by education officials on the grounds that decision-making authority needed to be spread beyond school heads to other stakeholders, such as teachers. This position is consistent with the spirit of shared decision-making, an important feature of decentralised school governance. The school heads' reported lack of support for the Cluster Resource Teacher, and their apparent desire to re-capture decision-making authority to coordinate the cluster, pointed to their resistance to change. Thus, the tendency to re-capture authority seemed to prevail, not only in the higher tiers of the education system as reported earlier, but also in the lower tiers, such as at the school head level. This brings to the fore the policy implementation dilemmas theory, which states that organisations have a tendency to centralise the control of what goes on in them, including re-possessing, if need be, decision-making authority that hitherto, may have been decentralised (Smyth & van der Vegt, 1993). Resistance against the spread of decision-making authority across all stakeholders poses a barrier to decentralised school governance.

In their questionnaire responses, 10 (25 percent) out of the 40 teachers reported that the objective to establish an organisational structure to sustain continuous staff development was not being achieved at all. Eleven (27.5 percent) of them perceived little achievement of the objective, while eight (20 percent) reported average achievement. In contrast, eight (20 percent)

reported high fulfilment of the objective and three (7.5 percent) reported total achievement. Overall more than half (52.5 percent) of the teachers consulted, reported little to no achievement at all, of this objective. Some 20 percent of them reported average achievement. The remaining 27.5 percent reported high to total achievement of the objective.

Teachers' written comments in their questionnaire responses suggest that, although the BSPZ cluster structure existed, it was not serving its purpose. Some of the comments included the notion that: 'the cluster is too big' and that 'when it comes to having courses, it's difficult for teachers to go, leaving pupils unattended'. Other comments included:

[BSPZ] has not yet started to address its objectives but has become a debt collector and a photocopying empire at a commercial level.

There should be equal access to BSPZ materials and equipment such as books, computers and typewriters.

There is need to re-awaken the cluster. The cluster system, to me is a white elephant.

The BSPZ is [more] helpful in town schools than in rural areas. Teachers in rural areas are not benefiting at all.

In interviews conducted with them, unlike the school heads, most teachers felt that although the cluster arrangement was not working well, the idea of clustering schools was noble. Interviews with teachers revealed, further, that the reference to the BSPZ as a debt collector was informed by the fact that it levied clusters. Teachers' major criticism of the system was that there was no transparency in the way money was spent. One respondent also dubbed the

programme a photocopying empire because the District Resource Centre ran a reprographic unit, where schools could reproduce materials at a fee, as an income-generating project. Teachers in Chikanda cluster reported that the bone of contention was that schools were the source of a cluster's funding and, therefore, they should not have to pay the cluster for subsequent services.

These responses suggest that there was poor communication within the BSPZ organisational structure. Income-generation seemed to be the only way forward towards combating the BSPZ's evident lack of resources, but some stakeholders did not think that the project was achieving this goal. There was, therefore, a lack of faith among the stakeholders that rendered the structure unattractive and ineffective as a tool for continuous staff development. This also signals differences in understandings of the decentralisation notion, in that some stakeholders view efforts towards self-sustenance as crucial to successful devolution, while others regard income-generation to be a burden to them. Thus, quality of communication is likely to be one of the issues at the centre of the success or failure of the decentralisation of school governance.

The above findings suggest that teachers and school heads do not find the cluster to be offering continuous and sustained staff growth. The perceptions of SDCs to this effect are addressed in item 6.4.3 below. Devolved school governance requires that stakeholders who are tasked with authority to make decisions should be capacitated continuously. Thus, lack of sustained staff

growth seemed to be one of the barriers to decentralised school governance in this cluster.

6.4.3 Extending the role of SDCs in schools

A further objective of the BSPZ cluster programme is to expand the capacities of SDCs, particularly the parent component, so that they become full partners in school governance, as opposed to being mere providers and maintainers of schools' physical infrastructure. This study investigated, through the perceptions of stakeholders, the extent to which the BSPZ had succeeded in developing the SDC's capacity to function as a full participant in school governance issues in the cluster.

In this regard, interviews with school heads revealed that they viewed parent governors as important, not only as school financiers, but also for the moral development of the school community. The parent governors mirrored the values held by the local community, which was especially important for young teachers entering the profession, and for community members, when parent governors acted as mediators in cases of school-community conflict.

Therefore, in the eyes of the school heads, SDCs played a much bigger role than what appeared on the surface. To illustrate, Chapter Five reports that Pfungi Primary had a much closer relationship with the local chief than other schools in the cluster. The Pfungi Primary school head reported that this relationship ensured a fluent tripartite means of communication between the school, the parents and the traditional leader. Through this cordial relationship, parents tended to respond positively to the school's financial

requests. However, school heads still held the view that the BSPZ had not transformed the SDC into full partners in school governance. As reported by one school head:

In most cases, SDC parent members rely on the school head to tell them their functions in the school. The policy document that stipulates the roles of the SDCs is written in English and most of them have just basic literacy, although they may be quite clever.

Asked why the BSPZ was not developing such capacity among the SDCs, one school head explained:

The BSPZ has tended to focus on teaching, given that there is so much to be done to improve the goings-on in the classroom. Parents themselves would want to see better pass rates.

While one cannot dispute that teaching and learning should be the core business of any school, the above response suggests that the BSPZ's capacity building efforts in Chikanda cluster were limited. Explaining this paradox, another school head argued:

The Rural District Council was supposed to work with clusters to develop the capacity of SDCs, but the council has reneged on this. You only see council officials coming to schools when the school head or the committee is alleged to be mishandling school funds.

Despite the apparent shortcomings of the Rural District Council reported above, the exclusion of SDCs from most cluster staff development workshops in Chikanda suggests that the SDC has not yet become an equal partner in school governance. The exclusion also suggests that teachers and school heads' understanding of the role of the SDC is one of a peripheral structure to the core business of the school, which has neither the capacity nor the interest to participate in decisions around such business.

Teachers' questionnaire responses show that of the 40 respondents, four (10 percent) reported no achievement at all towards the objective to expand the role of SDCs, while 10 (25 percent) perceived little achievement of the objective and 16 (40 percent) reported average achievement. In contrast, seven (17.5 percent) teachers reported high achievement of the objective and two (5 percent) perceived total fulfilment of the objective. Overall, 35 percent of the teachers surveyed perceived little to no achievement at all towards this BSPZ objective. Forty percent felt that the objective was being achieved to an average extent, while the rest (22.5 percent) reported high to total achievement of the same.

These responses suggest that, to some degree, teachers felt the presence of the SDC in the life of their schools, although the impact was not strong. In interviews with both teachers and heads, it was clear that the SDC has a very strong influence on the community's overall perception of the school. Such influence on the community was the committee's power base within the school. For example, as discussed in Chapter Five, in the case of Boka Primary, the SDC was able to re-engage parents after they had stopped paying school levies as a result of allegations of embezzlement of school funds on the part of the former school head.

Both the records of cluster action plans and interviews with teachers revealed that the SDC's role was hardly an issue on the cluster's agenda. The Cluster Resource Teacher explained:

The District Council does us down. They are supposed to develop the capacity of parent governors while we concentrate on

developing the capacity of teachers. All the Council has done is to install SDCs.

The above comment from the Cluster Resource Teacher reiterates the tension arising from the overlapping school governance roles of the Ministries of Education, Sports and Culture, and Local Government and Public Works. The former has no mandate over SDCs, and the latter, while responsible for SDCs, is peripheral to activities in schools. The teacher's response also implies that the BSPZ has not adequately integrated the various stakeholders into its capacity building programmes.

As a result of the inadequate integration into these programmes, the scope of SDCs' involvement in school governance seemed to remain limited.

Interviews with SDC members across the cluster showed that they saw themselves as more of a supportive unit to the school system than an equal partner in school governance. This is in agreement with findings in section 6.3 above, in which the involvement of SDCs in school decision-making tended to be restricted to the areas of finance and physical infrastructure. Responding to the question about how the BSPZ was helping SDCs become equal partners in school governance, the chairperson of one SDC explained:

We used to be called to meetings where we met SDCs from other schools, teachers and school heads. It used to be very exciting. What has happened to that, we really do not know.

The above response suggests that, not only had the cluster ceased to run capacity building programmes for SDCs, such programmes were never planned jointly with SDC members and other stakeholders. Rather, the former were passive participants in cluster activities. This points to an entrenched

and limited systemic understanding of the role of the SDC in school governance. This explains why the SDCs, as reported above, saw themselves as playing a supportive role to school heads and staff rather than an equal partner in school governance with them.

All the school heads and teachers reported that a lack of knowledge and skills to participate effectively in running schools was the major limiting factor among SDC members. To illustrate, while SDCs conducted their business (for example, meeting deliberations and minutes of meetings) in the home language, the laws governing schools are written in English, so they needed assistance from school heads and teachers to interpret these laws and regulations to them. It may be argued, perhaps rightly so, that there is nothing wrong with these stakeholders helping one another; after all, this is why the SDC is made up of these various stakeholders. However, in this case, parent governors are at the mercy of other stakeholders. Teachers and school heads may take advantage of them in the helping process. This seems to explain why parents did not contest their lack of involvement in most decisional areas investigated in this study.

Overall, while findings suggest that the SDC's role in the school is slowly expanding, the committee is still peripheral to the core business of the school. Due to limited capacity on their part, SDCs seemed not only content with the narrow scope of their participation in school governance, but also unaware of the many possibilities still untapped. If continuous training and development

remains lacking or inadequate, parents will continue to function at the periphery of school governance, impacting negatively on cluster activities.

The next section discusses the various factors that emerged as facilitating or hindering decentralised school governance in the cluster. These findings emerged from stakeholders in relation to their understandings, experiences and responses to decentralised governance, rather than a direct discussion of such factors.

6.5 Factors that facilitate or hinder decentralisation of school governance in the cluster

In the process of examining stakeholders' understandings, experiences of, and responses to decentralised school governance, factors that enable and hinder decentralisation emerged. Most teachers reported that schools were still largely governed through top-down decision-making approaches, whereby decisions are made at the top and relayed down the system for implementation. Thus, one hindrance to successful decentralisation is the strong propensity at higher tiers of the education system to monopolise decision-making. In addition, higher tiers are resistant to change. However, as argued earlier, the higher tiers of the education system may also release decision-making authority, but cautiously, lest the system fails to work as per their intentions. To discourage the withdrawal of decision-making powers from them, stakeholders in schools and clusters should acquit themselves in such a manner that they convince senior managers at higher tiers of the system that, as local level stakeholders, they can successfully make and implement

decisions. The tension, between the higher and lower levels of the system, cannot be ignored in the centralisation-decentralisation discourse. For example, when school finances are mishandled, as allegedly happened at Boka Primary, the higher tiers of the education system are likely to put more preventative controls in place. Where nepotism in the employment of teachers becomes rampant, as was alluded to earlier about this and other clusters in the country, central government is equally likely to intervene and re-introduce greater centralised control on such matters, thereby denting the decentralisation process.

My findings are that teachers and school heads perceive that decentralisation of school governance is being hampered by their superiors' apparent monopoly of decision-making powers. Teachers and school heads contend that there needs to be greater participatory decision-making involving those in the grassroots of the education system. While school heads and teachers felt that on the whole higher authorities in the education system dictated to them, teachers felt similarly dictated-to by other local level stakeholders. For example, teachers perceived that they had less involvement in school-parent meetings than they ought to have. This suggests that there are intra-school power struggles about how issues are decided and who participates in those decisions. Where power struggles prevail, decentralisation of school governance is not likely to thrive because such governance necessarily requires power sharing.

The use of English as the official medium of communication also posed a challenge to parents in general, and to parent governors in particular, since most parents were only literate in their home language, if literate at all. In effect, the language policy renders a contradiction in school governance. School governors are empowered supposedly to run the affairs of schools, yet they cannot cope adequately with the official language of communication. Examples of key documents to school governance that are written in English included the *Education Act* (Government of Zimbabwe, 1996a), *Rural District Councils Act* (Government of Zimbabwe, 1996b) and *Statutory Instrument 87* (Government of Zimbabwe, 1992), about the formation and functions of School Development Committees. Important Ministry of Education circulars such as those governing fees and levy increases, the recruitment of teachers and discipline in schools, are all in English as well. School heads reported that because most SDC parent members were not competent in this language of communication, they tended to rely on the heads to comprehend issues and to interpret their own roles in school governance. This scenario seemed to disempower parents as the key stakeholder constituency in the decentralisation process.

A further challenge to decentralisation of school governance was the combined lack of knowledge of what should be done and the capacity to achieve the decentralisation goals. Evidence that typifies this is the limited involvement of the SDC in school affairs. Without capacity to implement decisions, on the part of those tasked to manage those decisions, decentralisation of school governance would be futile.

The lack of capacity also manifested itself through a shortage of other resources. My findings suggest that decentralisation of school governance entails an adequate supply of financial resources. However, according to the stakeholders in Chikanda, such resources for the cluster were insufficient, to the extent that most planned workshops could not be held. If decentralised school governance is to achieve its goal of empowering people at the grassroots of the education system, so that they can achieve noble self-constructed goals, then the barrier of inadequate resources will have to be addressed.

On a positive note, the political will among parents to contribute in their own small way to the running of the schools, the presence of a legal framework to allow them to contribute, and the high level of formal education among school heads and teachers, all acted as potential enablers to decentralised school governance in the cluster.

Overall, my findings show that the cluster was faced with many more hindering than enabling factors for the decentralisation of school governance and that decentralised decision-making authority was unevenly distributed among the stakeholders. The impact of Zimbabwe's current socio-economic-political crisis on the education system cannot be overemphasised.

Resources are meagre, people are politically suspicious of one another, there is high apathy among civil servants, and government is forced to exercise greater control on almost all activity in society, and so on. Thus, the context into which the innovation of decentralised school governance is to be

implemented is crucial. Chapter Five addressed some aspects of such a context.

The next section summarises and briefly discusses the issues that emerge from the preceding presentation and discussion of findings.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter began by highlighting key features of a decentralised school governance system. These include the specific decisions that are decentralised, stakeholder capacity, and shared decision-making. No education system is likely to decentralise all decisions within its jurisdiction. However, meaningful devolution of power entails decentralising decision-making in key areas of school governance, such as pupil admissions, school organisation, curriculum, human, and financial resources. In implementing decentralised decisions, shared decision-making is important to create a sense of ownership and to improve the quality of such decisions. In addition, stakeholders need to have capacity to function effectively in the implementation of such decisions.

Second, the chapter then moved on to address stakeholders' understandings, experiences and responses regarding how decision-making in the cluster reflects the features of a decentralised school governance system, as identified above. This was tackled by examining decision-making in the areas of pupil admissions, school organisation, curriculum, human resources and financial resources. The findings suggest that decisions in the area of pupil

admissions are largely decentralised to the school level. However, most teachers felt deprived of decision-making authority in this area, despite their desire to be more involved.

In addition, SDC parent members did not think they needed to be more involved in making decisions in this area. This suggests that stakeholders within the schools had divergent understandings of decentralised school governance. It also suggests that even in cases where decision-making authority is decentralised to the school level, some stakeholders (for example, parents) may not realise the need to utilise such powers. Thus, the need to build capacity in stakeholders, for them to be able to function effectively in a decentralised school governance system, cannot be overemphasised.

Still on pupil admissions, stakeholders' views indicated that decision-making authority in this area was located and centralised in school heads. According to the stakeholders, while decisions around this issue was decentralised to the school level, only the school heads were involved in making the actual decisions. This centralised authority at the headship level within the school. This suggests that centralisation of authority should not be construed only as a feature associated with higher tiers of the education system. The tendency towards central control of decision-making was systemic to the entire education system. The local tendency (i.e. within the school) towards centralising authority seemed to be as inhibitive of decentralisation as when it occurred at the macro level (i.e. the higher tiers of the system), in that stakeholders who felt excluded were disgruntled in both cases.

Because most schools in the cluster sought to boost their enrolments, and thereby improve their statuses as required by government policy, pupil admissions created a spirit of competition (as opposed to cooperation) over learners among cluster member schools. This struggle for survival seemed to close most other avenues schools might use to foster mutual growth in the cluster. David Sarnoff's notion of competition confirms this scenario. He contends that 'competition brings out the most in products and the worst in people' (Brower & Balch, 2005, p. 87). Thus, schools may be situated in the same cluster but not be cooperating as much as the outside observer might expect of them.

With regard to the area of school organisation, national policy prescribes how all schools should be organised. Therefore, decision-making in this area was perceived as largely centralised. This suggests a contradiction in the policies of government, where on one hand decentralised school governance is adopted, but on the other, policy is prescribed from the top. Even in those decisions perceived to be localised, teachers still felt marginalised. The locus of power seemed to remain in the hands of school heads. Findings reveal that of all the consulted stakeholders, teachers experienced the least involvement in decision-making overall. This reinforces the observation made earlier in this chapter that centralisation of decision-making may manifest itself at various echelons of an organisation. This is a significant finding, whose implications are discussed in Chapter Seven.

In the curriculum area, stakeholders felt that although there were national prescriptions, most decisions regarding implementation were made at school level. Teachers perceived they had a high involvement in decision-making in this area, making it the only area of five investigated, in which the latter perceived such high involvement. This finding suggests that while decentralisation seems to work well for some issues and not others, decentralised school governance in the cluster has broadened the teacher's realm of decision-making authority in the school minimally. This is because he/she has always made some degree of curriculum decisions. At least, this has been the case since the attainment of political independence in Zimbabwe. However, SDC parent members did not make significant decisions in the area of curriculum and they did not feel the need to have more participation in decision-making. All the stakeholders consulted did not perceive parent governors to be equal partners with school personnel, for decisions about the curriculum. This apparently common understanding among the stakeholders stems from the traditional role relationships between parents and teachers, where the former was a mere financier of the school system. Thus, stakeholders' understanding of decentralised school governance seemed to be narrow, following the limited traditional role relationships. The decentralisation trend had not significantly transformed people's traditional notions of each other's roles and responsibilities in the running of schools.

In relation to school financial resources, decision-making in this area seemed to be the most decentralised compared with the other four areas. In financial

resources, the parent was distinctly the major decision-maker in the entire cluster, with teachers and school heads playing a peripheral role. My findings suggest that this was so because the parent was, almost entirely, the sole financier of the school. The dilemma was that because parents in the cluster locality were generally poor, they could not contribute much to the school. This severely limited the schools' resource bases and at the same time stifled shared decision-making necessary for successful decentralisation of school governance. This seems to validate the fear (see Chapter Three) that decentralisation is often construed as the panacea for all the shortcomings of centralised systems. Yet it is not.

Stakeholders' understandings of decentralised school governance, again, differed significantly in this area in that teachers felt deprived of decision-making authority while parents perceived it as their 'territory'. Thus, one of the dangers of decentralisation, depending on its nature, is that it can create a sense of ownership in one stakeholder and one of being neglected in another.

In the area of human resources, my findings suggest that the cluster was experiencing a process of re-centralisation over decisions to do with the hiring of staff, but high decentralisation in matters of staff development and staff appraisal. Lack of capacity to implement decisions seemed to be a major limiting factor among stakeholders. For example, owing to the lack of financial resources, the promotion and incentive structure, which was part of the appraisal system, had not been put in place. The re-centralisation of decision-making seemed to be as disempowering as the lack of capacity to decide.

The re-centralisation process is evidence of the tension between the centre (central government) and the periphery (local communities and schools). As pointed out earlier, in situations where the centre feels decentralisation is not working, the quick option tends to be that the centre limits or even re-possesses the authority that had been decentralised. In the case of Zimbabwe, my findings suggest that the most decision-making authority that grassroots communities exercise is merely delegated and not devolved to them. Therefore, this authority can be withdrawn from communities at any time.

Third, the chapter proceeded to examine findings in relation to stakeholders' perceptions regarding their capacity to function effectively in a decentralised system of school governance. What emerged from this is that the cluster was not adequately building capacity in all the stakeholders. To illustrate, management skills, including the supervision of staff and the management of finances, were reportedly lacking among school heads especially. Thus, efforts to decentralise school governance are not at an end after only creating structures such as the cluster. Such structures must be assisted to fulfil their function otherwise they cease to serve their purpose and they become 'white elephants'.

Fourth, the chapter highlighted the factors that facilitate or hinder decentralisation of school governance in the cluster. What emerged is that there are more inhibitors than enablers. Enabling factors included political will and the presence of well-qualified professional staff. Inhibitors included the

tendency to centralise decision-making control at the higher tiers of the education system, lack of capacity, and poor communication.

The next chapter seeks to explain school governance in the cluster by juxtaposing the theoretical frameworks and the findings.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Explaining School Governance in the Cluster

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploration
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.¹²

7.1 Introduction

Post-colonial education imperatives during the early 1990s triggered the decentralisation of school governance in Zimbabwe. These imperatives included the need to improve quality in education, the pressure to cut and share educational costs, and the desire to democratise the running of the system. The decentralisation trend saw the creation of School Development Committees (SDCs), through a statutory instrument of government. The SDC is a governing body, comprising five parents, the school head, his/her deputy, one teacher, and the local councillor. The Committee is tasked to provide and assist in the operation and development of the school, to advance the moral, cultural, physical and intellectual welfare of pupils at the school, and to promote the welfare of the school for the benefit of its present and future pupils and teachers.

To address the concerns for quality, a capacity-building intervention, the Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe (BSPZ), was launched in 1993. Through clusters of schools, the BSPZ was expected to design and run

¹² T.S. Eliot (cited in Bassey, 1999, p. 36)

capacity-building programmes for all stakeholders, namely, teachers, school managers and parents. In order to understand the successes and/or failures of an innovation, such as decentralisation of education by way of the School Development Committee, cluster system and the Better Schools Programme, it is necessary to learn how the intervention is understood, experienced and received by those tasked with implementing it, as well as the stakeholder capacities needed for it to work, and the factors that enable and/or inhibit that change (Fullan, 1993).

Against this backdrop, this inquiry investigated the stakeholders' understandings and experiences of, and responses to decentralised school governance in one cluster (Chikanda) of five primary schools (Mishi, Boka, Pfungi, Mari and Konde) in the Gutu District of Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. The study revolved around three critical questions:

- What are stakeholders' understandings, experiences of, and responses to decentralised school governance in the cluster?
- What are the stakeholders' views of their capacity to function effectively in a decentralised school governance system?
- What factors hinder and/or enable decentralised school governance in the cluster?

From answers to these questions, the thesis aimed to explain school governance in this cluster. The preceding chapter presented the findings that address these three research questions. This chapter focuses on the analysis and discussion of the findings, organised around the question: What

explanations do the findings of this inquiry provide regarding school governance in the cluster? To address this question, using the three propositions advanced in Chapter Three of the thesis, the chapter explains school governance in the cluster in the light of the findings and draws some implications for school governance in Zimbabwe in general and in the cluster studied in particular.

7.2 Discussion

As discussed in Chapter Three of this report, this study is located within three broad theoretical frameworks. First, the locus of decentralised decision-making power (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Murphy & Beck, 1995) was used as a lens or framework for understanding the distribution (or lack of it) of decision-making power in schools. Second, the policy implementation dilemmas theory (Smyth & van der Vegt, 1993) explored the difficulties schools in the cluster face in attempting to implement the decentralisation policy. Third, the nature and context of change theory (Fullan, 1993) was used to analyse the ways in which the cluster has interpreted, enacted and managed the changes necessitated by the decentralisation policy.

Informed by these theoretical frameworks, three tentative propositions (Bassegy, 1999) about decentralised school governance in the cluster under study were suggested. Data collected in the field were used to explore them. This section discusses the conclusions in relation to these propositions.

7.2.1 Understandings, experiences and responses to decentralised school governance

In terms of the research questions that informed the study, this thesis first aimed to examine stakeholders' understandings, experiences and responses to decentralised school governance in the cluster. To this effect, the study was premised on the notion that schools in the cluster possess and exercise very limited decentralised school governance power. This is based on three factors.

First, at the national level, a strong national regulatory framework plus the tendency to re-centralise decision-making as resources dwindle or as a result of a perceived lack of capacity at the lower levels, militate against decentralisation. Second, at the school level, the uneven distribution of power and lack of coordination and cooperation among the various stakeholders (school heads, teachers and parents) hinder effective decentralisation. Third, the school and community context exert significant influence on the success of decentralisation efforts in the schools and the cluster. I will now discuss my conclusions about these three factors.

7.2.1.1 The influence of the national regulatory framework

The data analysed in the previous chapter indicates that a strong national regulatory framework drives school governance in Zimbabwe's public primary education system in general, and in the cluster studied in particular, and this strong and rigid drive hinders decentralisation efforts. To illustrate, the common curriculum followed by all such schools, the administration of schools

through a uniform organisational structure and the employment of teachers through the provincial office of education, are all indicative of centralised control of schools. Such centralisation of control is obviously anathema to decentralisation.

In addition, findings from the study suggest that district and provincial offices of education were reclaiming some of the authority that had been decentralised to schools (such as the hiring of teachers), as and when they deem the education enterprise to be in jeopardy. The centralisation tendency (Smyth & van der Vegt, 1993) in which organisations, in this case the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, experience a strong push to centrally coordinate the implementation of policy, lest things fall apart, might explain this tendency. To illustrate, in this study, officials in higher tiers of the Zimbabwean education system (for example, the District Education Director and the Provincial Education Director) argued that re-centralisation decisions were informed by findings that schools were not coping with the responsibility of hiring teachers.

Thus, in this cluster, the strong national regulatory framework tends to promote centralisation rather than the intended decentralisation. As the literature reviewed in this study suggests, centralisation and decentralisation tend to denote different positions on a continuum (Buckland & Hofmeyr, 1993; Winkler, 1989). Or, using a different metaphor, the two processes of centralisation and decentralisation can be viewed as a spectrum that has a range from a unitary system, where central government has the most

decision-making authority, to a diversified system, where local communities exercise large amounts of power as they see best. Thus, with central government exercising the most decision-making authority, in spite of the decentralisation policy, the schools in the cluster are, overall, left with limited prospects for self-governance.

Findings in this inquiry also suggest that as much as the regulatory framework is strong, it is also problematic. While the SDC parent component, teachers and school heads are the key stakeholders in the decentralisation discourse, with regard to schooling, they are accountable to two different ministries of government. On one hand, the SDCs for public schools are an arm of the Rural District Council (RDC), which, in turn, is connected to the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works. Apart from officially installing SDCs and being the legal authority of schools, the RDC is reportedly absent as far as supporting school governance efforts is concerned. On the other, educators are accountable to the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture, which is only responsible for educators and their professional duties.

Emerging from the findings in this study is the indication that there is no evident coordination between the two stakeholder Ministries with regard to school governance. There are a few possible interpretations for the implications. The absence of coordination efforts might denote a straightforward and full decentralisation of school governance to the school level. The lack of coordination might also suggest that these authorities, particularly the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, have abdicated their responsibility to resource schools and to build capacity

necessary for effective decentralisation as well as for effective teaching and learning. In addition, it might mean that because schools are accountable to different authorities, which themselves do not cooperate on issues relating to these schools, the professional and the parent components of the school would also find it difficult to work together for the good of the school. To recall, literature reviewed in this inquiry (such as Fullan, 1993) contends that even in a decentralised system, some amount of central coordination is necessary, without which there is a high risk for disorganisation, with various sub-systems following different priorities and/ or producing incompatible outputs.

Thus, based on the above, this thesis argues that the centralisation tendency is strong in the Zimbabwean education system in general, and (as a knock-on effect) in the cluster studied in particular. This is because, as pointed out in Chapter One, the Zimbabwean education system has a long history of centralised control, to the extent that, in the post-independence era, those in higher tiers of the organisation evidently are unwilling to shed some of their decision-making authority, and have little confidence in the capacity of those at the lower tiers to make the same decisions. This centralisation tendency negates the notion identified and discussed in Chapter Two of this report, that the devolution of school governance decision-making power can only succeed in a reciprocal relationship between the higher and the lower tiers of the education system, in which the former is willing to relinquish some of its power, and the latter is able to utilise such power. This may explain why educators in the selected cluster perceived little decentralised school governance overall.

On a more positive note, this thesis argues that, rather than the separate and largely unequal control of school matters among different stakeholders (parents, school heads and teachers), a combined, shared system of control would benefit schools and promote decentralised school governance in the cluster. This thesis, therefore, argues for Community-Professional-Administrative Control (CPAC), in which teachers, school managers and parents are equal partners in school governance. Their roles are inextricably interwoven and inter-dependent, making the equal partnership CPAC model better suited for decentralisation.

7.2.1.2 Uneven distribution of power within schools

This thesis also posits that the little decision-making power that makes its way to the school level tends to be unevenly distributed among stakeholders, with school heads enjoying the most power at this level, while parents and teachers have the least. For example, school heads have the overall administrative authority at the school level, while teachers have some powers in relation to curriculum, and parents determine fees and levies within the maximum limits that central government prescribes from time to time.

Linked to the above, in terms of their understandings and experiences regarding decentralised school governance, findings from this study suggest that educators (teachers and school heads) and parent governors in Chikanda cluster have different views. To illustrate, on one hand, educators felt that school governance decision-making was still largely in the hands of those in higher tiers of the education system. Comments such as *'we are just sent*

circulars that tell us everything' are testimony to this perception. On the other, despite their unenviable status highlighted above, in the various interviews held with them, parents in general, and SDC parent members in particular, felt empowered and a sense of ownership of the schools. According to them, this was largely because they had the final say (within the constraints of the law) regarding one of the key resources of the organisation, namely, finances. As argued by Taylor (cited in Bush & Heystek, 2005, p. 169) regarding the South African school governance scenario:

The increased financial burden that the state has been willing to devolve to parents through the payment of school fees has also encouraged a sense of entitlement among parents to a clear voice in the decisions affecting the schooling of their children.

Given that the greatest source of revenue for schools is parents, SDC parent members have a strong influence on the rates of payment of fees and levies in the schools. This, in turn, strongly influences, not only the financial status of a school, but also its image before other schools and the community at large. To this effect, the policy of decentralised school governance is palatable to parents in so far as they can decide financial matters. This is in line with the proposition I advanced in Chapter Three i.e. that decentralised decision-making authority, no matter how little, is empowering to those exercising it.

The problematic dual ownership of schools, described above, in which parent governors are not accountable to the mainstream education administration system, may partially explain differences in perceptions about decentralised school governance. For example, parent governors' understandings differed significantly from that of educators' in that parents were content with deciding

school financial matters only, while teachers were looking for more authority in more areas of decision-making. Furthermore, within the school, I found there are significant differences in perceptions about the nature of decentralised school governance – even between teachers and school heads. The former felt deprived in all the areas investigated save for curriculum, while the latter believed that teachers are adequately involved in making all decentralised decisions.

The perception differences can be explained by the locus of decentralised decision-making (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Murphy & Beck, 1995). When decision-making power for a given area is located in one stakeholder group, that group tends to be, not only content with the status quo, but also oblivious to the needs of other stakeholders. To illustrate, parent governors dominated all decisions regarding school finances and they felt a high sense of ownership over their decisions, while teachers reported high involvement in only one of these areas, curriculum, and school heads dominated decision-making in the other three areas: human resources, school organisation, and pupil admission. In this instance, the shared decision-making that is characteristic of and, indeed, desirable for a decentralised school governance system, is largely lacking in this cluster. Instead, the locus of control seems to exist in different places and levels within the school. To this effect, as I discussed in Chapter Three, Leithwood and Menzies (1998) conclude that the school head, as the chief administrator, enjoys administrative control, while the teachers hold professional control and parents benefited from community control.

7.2.1.3 The influence of the school and community context

The status of a Zimbabwean public non-government school in general, and of those schools in Chikanda cluster in particular, depends on its size as measured by the enrolment. In turn, the enrolment is a determinant of the revenue accruing to the school by way of school fees and levies. As reported in Chapter Five, Chikanda cluster serves poor communities. The proximity of the schools in the cluster is such that many parents have an option to choose which of the five schools to enrol their children. Thus, their choice is largely made on the basis of the amounts charged as fees and levies, and the school's track record in financial management.

Against this backdrop, the findings from this inquiry were that schools in the cluster compete for pupils, because this determines their financial survival. As a result, they conduct their business more as individual schools than as a cluster. Thus, the schools are more competitive than co-operative, which contradicts the 'significant other' spirit that informs the cluster ideal. Thus, concomitant with the dilemmas organisations face in attempting to implement policy, as typified by the policy implementation dilemmas theory (Smyth & van der Vegt, 1993), the schools in the cluster are confounded by these financially-driven contradictory pressures to cooperate and compete with neighbouring institutions.

Another dilemma in the cluster emanates from the fact that, while teachers and school heads generally perceive they have minimal decentralised school governance decision-making authority, individual schools and the cluster are

empowered to make decisions regarding all forms of staff development they deem necessary. To this effect, decentralisation can be said to be taking root. However, due to financial constraints (such as poverty among local communities), not much organised staff development occurs. In this regard, Chikanda can be classed as a non-resilient cluster (Christie and Potterton, cited in Moletsane, 2002). I attempt to explain such non-resilience in the sections below.

7.2.2 Stakeholders' capacity for a decentralised system of governance

The second research question sought to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of their capabilities to function effectively in a decentralised school governance system. In relation to this, Chapter Three proposed that owing to a limited understanding of decentralised school governance as an innovation, as well as limited knowledge, skills and resources to implement it among the stakeholders in the cluster under study, the innovation would not succeed.

This was based on the work of Bennett, Crawford and Riches, (1992) and Fullan (1993) on the nature and context of change, which asserts that change usually fails when the nature (such as purpose, complexity and clarity) and context (such as community, principal and teacher) of the change are not clearly understood by stakeholders.

Contrarily, as reported in Chapter Six, teachers and school heads in the cluster were academically and professionally well qualified, with a significant number of them holding qualifications above the minimum required for teaching (for example, two of the five school heads and 10 of the 40 teachers

held bachelor degrees). In addition, over 60 percent of the respondent teachers had six or more years teaching experience. Such high credentials, within the context of primary schools in Zimbabwe, endow the cluster well with the capacity to develop and enhance school effectiveness. In such a context, educators ought to be able to interpret policy, analyse, design and run staff development activities in the cluster, among other responsibilities. However findings suggest that these potential abilities lie idle.

Explaining this tendency, in their own work on factors influencing the success of innovations in schools, Berman and McLaughlin (1977) conclude that innovations that have the support of the principal (school head) are more likely to perform well. My findings are that although principals do not deny teachers permission to engage in cluster activities, they have a low opinion of the cluster programme as well as teacher leadership. School heads from Chikanda cluster felt these responsibilities were not for teachers, and the indirect effect was a withholding of support for cluster activities, including staff development. Instead, school heads were more receptive to staff development interventions from higher tiers of the education system. Thus apart from over-supporting central control and co-ordination of almost all organisational activities and promoting the top-down approach to decision-making, this tendency also stifles bottom-up decision-making possibilities. My findings are that, in response to this central tendency, school heads are more comfortable and accepting of the status quo than an innovation. Such behaviour does not seem to be informed by the source of innovations. Rather, it is based on school heads wanting to remain in their comfort zone. Such

resistance to change poses a significant barrier to, among others, capacity building for the implementation of decentralised school governance in the cluster.

Low levels of education among parents in general, and parent governors in particular, pose a stumbling block to increasing their involvement in decision-making. This is because all the relevant legal documents pertaining to school governance, such as the *Education Act*, *Rural District Councils Act* and *Statutory Instrument 84*, that established School Development Committees, are all written in English. I found that while all parent governors in the cluster were able to read and write in their own home language, their levels of education were generally low. Thus, the language barrier and low levels of education, among other factors, limit parent governors' capacity and confidence to participate more widely in school governance.

As reported in Chapter Three, scholars (for example, McGinn & Welsh, 1999), assert that in a decentralised system of education stakeholders need to have organisational and management capacity to run their own affairs. Such capacity is hard to come by where stakeholders are lowly educated. Experience in England and Australia (Bush and Gamage, 2001; Bush and Heystek, 2005), for example, suggests that parent governors are likely to require substantial support from the principal in carrying out their responsibilities. Bush and Heystek's (2003) research in the Gauteng province of South Africa shows that most school governing bodies are not fulfilling their policy-making role, but they rely on the principal to do this. This is attributed,

in part, to low levels of literacy among parents. Similarly, based on their study of problems facing principals in attempting to optimise parental involvement in school activities, van der Westuizen and Mosoge (van der Westuizen & Mosoge, 2001) find that the former are of the opinion that parents in rural areas and lower socio-economic areas present a special problem to parental involvement (poor economic base, lack of skills including literacy, and so on). My findings are consistent with these results. To illustrate, to educators in the cluster, it had become a relatively accepted point that most parents had limited skills and capacity for effective involvement and contribution to school governance issues. To the parents themselves, it was also almost a given that their school governance role was restricted to finance and infrastructure development of the school. This narrow understanding among parents of their role in school governance indicates a lack of capacity, real and perceived, on their part. The dual ownership of schools, described above, which tends to leave parent governors in a 'no man's land' in terms of opportunities for growth, might explain this lack of capacity. In a system in which stakeholders in the same school are accountable to different authorities, and in which there is a lack of coordination of activities and resources, the cooperation and pooling of resources and efforts necessary for shared decision-making in a decentralised system of governance becomes very difficult.

In addition to the influence of human resources, with regard to financial and material resources, my findings were that Chikanda cluster did not have the capacity to function effectively in a decentralised school governance system. Apart from the levy collected from pupils, which in some cases was erratic,

the cluster was unable to engage in other forms of fund raising. Such lack of capacity is entrenched further by the poor economic base of the communities surrounding the schools and the parent population. In addition, the cluster lacked the entrepreneurial drive necessary to generate funds. As a result, staff development workshops were very scarce. The nature and context of change in general, and the complexity of the innovation in particular, explains the lack of capacity in the cluster.

As reported in Chapter Three, such complexity refers to the difficulty as well as the extent of change required of those responsible for implementation (Fullan, 1992; Senge, 1990). Change can be examined in terms of difficulty, skills required, the extent of alterations in beliefs, etcetera. In terms of beliefs, stakeholders in Chikanda cluster do not seem to believe that they can develop themselves, which blocks any initiative from emerging. In terms of skills, this thesis argues that the cluster must have an adequate grasp of the complexity of decentralised school governance, and adequate skills and resources to implement such change. While the factors enabling and/or inhibiting decentralised school governance in Chikanda cluster are implicit within the above sections, the next section attempts to explicitly identify and explain these.

7.2.3 Factors enabling and/or hindering decentralised school governance in the cluster

The third research question of the study was: What factors hinder and/or enable the decentralisation of school governance? To address this question,

as demonstrated in the sections above, Chapter Three posited that the devolution of school governance decision-making power can only succeed in a reciprocal relationship between central government, local government and schools, in which the former is willing to relinquish some of its power, and the latter (schools) are able to claim more power, as well as use it to implement the decisions in question. Concomitant with this view, as described in the following paragraphs, my findings are that the cluster experienced more hindrances than enablers to decentralised school governance.

7.2.3.1 The hierarchical structure of the education system

First, scholars reviewed in this thesis (for example, Lauglo, 1996; Murphy & Beck, 1995; Rondinelli, Nelson, & Cheema, 1987) suggest that the hierarchical nature of organisations, such as government departments, in themselves make decentralisation difficult to implement. To illustrate, sections of the literature suggest that political support is necessary for successful decentralisation of school governance (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). Political support, in this case, entails the willingness of key stakeholders to see to the successful implementation of an idea. My findings are that at both national and local levels of the Zimbabwean education system, there is political will to implement decentralised school governance, as evidenced by the national policy framework.

As reported in Chapter One, the law stipulates that the School Development Committee (SDC) shall be the governor of every public, non-government school in the country. The Committee, made up of stakeholders within and

around a school, is in place at every school. The spirit is that all stakeholders ought to participate in making decisions about issues that affect them. To this effect, at the local level, as reported earlier, the SDC parent members in Chikanda cluster expressed a high sense of ownership of the schools. For example, they were committed to accounting for all the school funds entrusted to them. School heads and teachers felt that the presence of parents as governors offered a sound cushion and lent legitimacy to their work.

The Policy Implementation Dilemmas Theory (PIDT) (Smyth & van der Vegt, 1993), which suggests that policy implementation induces, among others, pressures for local autonomy, might explain this mutual commitment and support for the innovation. For example, the Zimbabwean education system has given some discretionary decision-making powers to individual schools and clusters. This framework has led to some level of local autonomy, in which stakeholders at the school level might exercise some authority for the running of their school, hence their support for the change.

However, my findings also suggest that a competing pressure, the centralisation tendency, outweighs the pressure for local autonomy, as described above. This evidence is that the district, provincial and national tiers of Zimbabwe's education system (the regulatory framework) exercise strong co-ordination roles. This central control tendency apparently is informed by the desire to increase accountability and effectiveness of the system. In the process, the locus of school governance decision-making power remains in the higher echelons outside the school, thus favouring the national outlook of

the education system at the expense of the local. Therefore, the battle to create a balance between central coordination and the degree of autonomy that central government allows at the grassroots is being lost in favour of centralisation.

This political framework, in which local structures have been put in place to implement the policy of decentralised school governance, also posed contradictions for the implementation of decentralised school governance in Chikanda cluster. On the one hand, the national policy framework for decentralised school governance functioned as an enabling factor. On the other, the policy had not been sufficiently translated into practice. At the central government level, evidence from this study shows that while the policy discourse is one of decentralisation, certain functions and decision-making powers are being returned to central government and rendering a strong re-emergence of re-centralisation.

In addition, while some decision-making powers continue to be located at the school level, the uneven distribution of power, characteristic of a non-democratic system of governance prevails in all schools, further hindering decentralisation efforts. Thus, while the policy of decentralisation may well be understood in schools, and might even be welcome, undemocratic school cultures, and the centralisation of power in the management of schools tend to militate against shared decision-making in all aspects of schooling, and decentralised school governance remains elusive.

7.2.3.2 Hierarchical organisation of schools

The organisational structure of the education system poses as another inhibiting factor to decentralised school governance. To illustrate, there is evidence that school heads found it difficult to function under the cluster leadership of a 'mere' teacher. In essence, they were insubordinate. To them, cluster leadership went 'against the grain'. This arises against the background that the structure of schools is such that teachers report to school heads and not the other way round. In Chapter Three of this thesis I argued that, although decentralised school governance entails a scenario where central government has shed off significant portions of its responsibilities to grassroots authorities, in practice, the top-down decision-making model, as opposed to the bottom-up model, characterises the Zimbabwean education system. I further proposed that there seems to be a deep-rooted lack of confidence, on the part of those operating in higher tiers of the system, in the ability of those in the lower rungs (for example, schools and clusters), to make significant school governance decisions. Not only do findings confirm this proposition, they also show that it applies even at the school level. As such, the hierarchical organisational structure of the education system tends to exert pressure on school heads to defy the logic behind teacher leadership of the cluster and reduce their confidence in the arrangement.

7.2.3.3 History of innovation failure

The failure of previous innovations poses as another inhibiting factor. As entailed in Fullan's (1993) work on the nature and context of change, a history of failure or success in innovation attempts by a system or part of it, is likely to

have a similar impact on new attempts at implementing change. This view suggests that because people carry meanings from one experience to the next, the more stakeholders have negative experiences from previous implementation attempts, the more apathetic they will be about the next change, irrespective of the merits of the new idea.

Concomitant with this view, findings from this study show that after decentralising the hiring of teachers to the school level in 2001, and after subsequent countrywide outcries against alleged nepotism and favouritism in the process, there was an emerging trend for increased control of schools by central government. Those in the higher tiers of the system (education officials) blamed those in the grassroots (teachers and parents) for abusing decentralised power and for lacking the requisite capacity to function effectively in a decentralised system and therefore decision-making authority was withdrawn from them. Even where such authority was not withdrawn (for example in cluster capacity building programmes), stakeholders were still apathetic to implement decentralised decisions. Thus, the apathy in Chikanda cluster to initiate and engage in on-going staff development activities can be partly explained by the history of failure. Therefore innovation failures in organisations tend to impact negatively on subsequent attempts at change by these institutions. This suggests that innovations must be well conceived and articulated since they bear far-reaching implications.

7.2.3.4 Context realities

Similarly, donor dependency syndrome poses as another historical factor that negatively impacts on decentralised school governance. In this regard, the cluster was non-resilient, in that it was not been able to 'weather the storm' in terms of making itself self-reliant and viable at the end of the donor period. As reported in Chapter Five, some clusters in the same district were apparently succeeding in self-financing and self-direction. Such self-determination is consistent with the conceptualisation of good governance described in Chapter Three of this thesis. To reiterate, good governance is understood to signify an efficient system able, among other things, to identify novel sources of funding and generally adopt a business-like approach in the running of its affairs (Stoker, 1996).

As demonstrated in earlier sections, this indicates that the context within which change is implemented is crucial for determining the success or failure of that innovation. As such, a strong explanation for the failure of decentralised school governance in Chikanda may lie in the contextual factors within this particular cluster.

7.2.3.5 Poor resourcing of education

The study found that lack of support from the higher tiers of the education system serves as another hindrance to decentralised school governance in the cluster. To illustrate, literature suggests that the two concepts, centralisation and decentralisation tend to denote different degrees on a continuum (Buckland & Hofmeyr, 1993; National Education Policy

Investigation, 1992). There can therefore be no such thing as total decentralisation in all aspects of the administration of a system (unless the system is totally privatised). This is because it would yield a fragmented arrangement without a centre. This conceptualisation indicates that the centre (central government), which is usually more resourced and stable, must necessarily support the periphery (individual schools and clusters), which is usually less resourced and turbulent, if the system is to prosper and remain coherent.

Contrarily, findings from the study show that the cluster under study and the individual schools therein lacked the support described above. To illustrate, while decisions about performance appraisal were decentralised to the school level, central government was not honouring its promises to reward good performance by way of salary advancements and promotions. As a result, schools no longer took the process seriously.

Lack of incentives for taking up the post of Cluster Resource Teacher is a second example of the lack of support that poses as a hindrance to decentralised school governance in the cluster. In this study, the teacher who shouldered the extra load of coordinating cluster activities, was not remunerated for this added responsibility, neither was he granted official time to perform such duties. Instead, the teacher was required to teach a full class for a full eight-hour day like any other teacher. He was left to coordinate the cluster during his/her free time. Such multiple demands on a significant teacher's time are likely to impact negatively on the activities of a cluster. In

Chapter Two, I argued that the nature of clusters in Zimbabwe is consistent with the intermediate model (Bray, 1987; Education Quality Review, 2004), in which higher authorities formally group schools, but where the grouping does not wield much power over members. The findings described above indicate that, in practice, Chikanda cluster was slowly moving towards the least extreme model, in which membership is voluntary and can be abandoned. Therefore, the apparently unchecked gap between the official cluster model and the cluster in practice is jeopardising the effective decentralisation of school governance in the cluster.

A third illustrative factor on lack of support for the cluster is the poor economic base of its communities. Parents in the cluster could not afford to pay competitive fees and levies. Although I argue for self-reliance above, my findings are that there is a limit to this principle. This is consistent with the argument advanced in Chapter Three, that self-reliance may be problematic in developing contexts where local communities lack resources for their efficient functioning. As such, because of the limited material resources that might be shared among member schools, the push towards individualism is stronger than the pull towards cooperation and being a cluster. This finding challenges the notion that the meagreness of resources in individual schools may serve as an attraction of those institutions towards co-operation.

Thus, at a more basic level, while it is common knowledge that schools such as those in Chikanda are located in extremely poor communities and that expecting them to be self-funding is futile, no commitment of adequate

funding from central government to support their governance efforts and capacity building is forthcoming, leading to the failure of decentralisation.

The above raises questions about the Zimbabwean education system's reasons for decentralising. Literature reviewed in this thesis indicates that key reasons why education systems decentralise include the desire to increase participatory decision-making, to improve efficiency and effectiveness, and to cut and/or share costs (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). While all these three reasons seem to have motivated the move to decentralise school decision-making in Zimbabwe, the pressure on central government to cut educational costs seems to have been the strongest, even to the extent of government renegeing on its promises and abdicating its responsibility.

In the light of the preceding attempt to explain school governance in the cluster under study, some implications thereof emerge. The next section discusses these.

7.3 Some implications for decentralised school governance

This section attempts to address the question: What lessons can be learnt from this case study regarding how decentralised school governance in this and similar contexts can be enhanced? I draw the implications from two important points of the education system in Zimbabwe: the macro and the micro levels. The decision to address implications at these two levels is informed by the notion that governance entails the exercise of authority within a given legal framework, and that the way such a legal framework is

configured and authority subsequently exercised through it will influence the decentralisation of school governance in the system.

First, the current legal framework, in which the SDC, the key stakeholders to which school governance power and authority are devolved, is not an arm of the Education Ministry, but of another authority, namely, the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, is untenable and counterproductive to the decentralisation of school governance in general, and the support of effective teaching and learning in the schools. This scenario points to a very limited conception of school governance, that is merely concerned with the development of the physical infrastructure of schools. One of the key rationales for decentralising school governance is to enhance school effectiveness: the extent to which a school achieves its objectives. The key objective of any school is to achieve sound teaching and learning. Therefore, a new legal framework, which will allow the SDC to become part of the Education Ministry's structures, needs to be forged. Alternatively, clear strategies for collaboration between these two ministries and the agencies accountable to them need to be developed and implemented, particularly with regard to school governance.

Second, decentralised school governance is driven by a country's relevant regulatory framework contained in legal documents such as statutes, regulations and circulars. Such documents must be easily accessible to and consumable by all stakeholders. In Zimbabwe, all legal documents regarding school governance are written in English. This is not consistent with the

context in which the policies in question are to be implemented, where most SDC parent members do not adequately understand the language. Given that governance entails the whole process of formulating, adopting, implementing and evaluating policies, it goes without saying that the rural folk in Zimbabwe have not participated in such processes regarding education. Therefore, this thesis suggests that all the legal documents to do with school governance should be published in the major indigenous languages as well. In addition, continuing education, including adult basic education and training, in which the parent population are provided with literacy and numeracy skills necessary for individual and community development, as well as effective participation in democratic governance of schools, needs to be mounted in the clusters. Possibly this could serve also to enhance communication between parents and educators. However, the unequal power relations between the two stakeholders, if not adequately addressed, might prove a formidable hindrance to this proposed 'marriage' of parents and educators, further militating against decentralised school governance in which all stakeholders participate equally.

Third, the leadership factor is crucial to the success or failure of the implementation of any change. This study's findings indicate that those operating in higher tiers of the education system tend to be strong disciples of centralised decision-making. As such, they find it difficult to share, let alone devolve, power to schools. There was no evidence of a sustained dialogue to determine what issues schools and clusters feel competent to decide upon and those they feel not so able to tackle, and there seemed to be lack of

sound leadership on the part of those in higher offices. Scholars (such as Fullan, 1992) suggest that leadership skills associated with power sharing are hard to come by. Leaders seem unable to give up power without losing control. Instead of the usual downward trend of leadership training in which workshops are cascaded to the grassroots of the organisation, it is necessary for the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture to engage in an upward trend of training leaders in decision-making that involves power sharing. Such training is needed at all levels of the education system, from the school to the national level.

Fourth, available literature and findings from this study point to schools and clusters needing external assistance to be able to function effectively in a decentralised system of school governance. Such assistance should be forthcoming from those stakeholders outside the school or cluster. The mere presence of structures such as SDCs and clusters does not translate into fully functional sub-systems. The coordination function of the national, provincial and district authorities should include research into the reasons why structures do not function as they ought. This suggests that leadership training for those managing individual schools and clusters is also needed. I propose that external assistance (not only from the two Ministries to which the stakeholders are accountable, but also from other community structures such as non-governmental organisations) should focus on helping schools and clusters to help themselves. The way to achieve this is to develop the knowledge and skills of their stakeholders. As I reported above, the cluster studied is endowed with well qualified human resources that are lying idle.

This may be because cluster members have no confidence in the ability of those in their midst, and instead look for assistance elsewhere, usually to those higher in the system. Thus, as a support service, external interventions that will assist the cluster to realise its own potential in terms of decision-making and staff development is needed. Such support can be withdrawn as soon as the cluster begins to use its own human resources for organisational and professional development activities, towards the realisation of decentralised school governance. One way to achieve this would be to have the cluster programme implemented in partnership with universities and other institutions of higher learning, such as teachers' colleges. Such partnerships would enable more knowledge production, thus more informed decision-making on ways of improving the quality of education.

Fifth, linked to the above, there can be no substitute for continuous development of stakeholders' capacity to implement decentralised school governance. The cluster approach seems to be quite appropriate to achieve this goal. However, this approach can only succeed if those employed to steer it are accorded the due respect and rewards. To achieve this, the post of Cluster Resource Teacher needs to be converted to a full time one, so that a stable cluster base can be built. Alternatively, the teaching load of the incumbent can be reduced to allow them time to work for the cluster. In addition, as explained in the theory of change (Fullan, 1992), the teacher is a crucial factor for the context of change. This is so because on the one hand, teachers can be major assets for change, but on the other, they can be a liability. The culture of a school or cluster (among other factors) in terms of the

locus of decision-making powers, determines the type of teacher therein. In this regard, the teacher must be given opportunities to experience decision-making power. Contrary to this, this study found that decentralised decision-making powers were largely centralised within the school head. This suggests a need for leadership training for both teachers and school heads.

Sixth, the argument that parent governors are not formally educated and therefore cannot cope with the whole range of school governance issues seems counter-productive if decentralisation is to succeed. The cluster must take it upon itself to empower its own stakeholders. As observed by Bush and Heystek (2005), developing school governors is critical to the provision of quality education and to the wider requirement for democratic empowerment. As such, adult education that goes beyond basic reading and writing, to encompass such knowledge and skills as interpreting legal documents, basic accounting, communication, and so on, needs to become part of each school's and cluster's responsibility. Thus, in as much as schools look to their communities to fend for them during cost-sharing eras, communities are also entitled to looking to their schools for development opportunities. Dividends of such a mutual relationship abound. But for educators to play this role, they themselves must continue to learn. Chikanda cluster, which lent towards being learning-impooverished, should move towards becoming a learning-enriched organisation (Rosenholtz, 1989) through continuous learning. For this particular cluster an external intervention, as I argued earlier, may be a necessary interim measure.

Seventh, decentralised school governance cannot be achieved without a strong resource base on the part of individual schools and the cluster. In the context of dwindling financial and other material resources, the harsh reality is that the Zimbabwean government is not likely to make another policy paradigm shift from cost-cutting to full government sponsorship of education. Even if it wished to do so, the Zimbabwean government is unlikely to have the necessary resources. Instead, the solution appears to lie in Chikanda cluster building its own resources. For example, the government per capita grant earmarked for textbooks has become far too low, to the extent that in many schools, four or more pupils share one textbook. To address this, in this context, while recognising the poverty of many households and communities, parents need to be persuaded to shift their expectations from free education and instead buy textbooks for their children. This may release part of the school fee income for other projects. In addition, fundraising activities need to be developed to supplement the school fees. This is possible, for example, in the context of the geographical area in which the cluster studied is located, which is endowed with abundant underground and flowing water. Joint school-community small-scale irrigation schemes are possible, and from these, fundraising activities (including vegetable sales from a market garden) might unfold.

From the findings and analysis presented in this thesis, and the limitations of this case study in terms of scope and methodology, several implications for further research emerge. The next section discusses some of these.

7.4 Some implications for further research

First, scholars (for example, Abu-Duhou, 1999; McGinn & Welsh, 1999) reveal that the fundamentals to decentralisation are local control and shared decision-making. This study's findings suggest two important issues in this regard: local control is still very limited and the locus of power within the school largely lies in the school head, rendering inadequately shared decision-making. Thus, it seems necessary to investigate further how local control of decision-making can be enhanced and how schools in general and school heads in particular may be assisted to spread the locus of decision-making power more evenly to other stakeholders. Methodologically, this might suggest an action research project, in which existing trends in local decision-making are studied, with the intention of developing workable alternatives.

Second, the cluster studied turned out to be learning-impoverished, as opposed to being learning-enriched (Rosenholtz, 1989). In addition, it was effectively a non-resilient enterprise. As discussed earlier, this means that the cluster was unable to overcome, or at least reduce, obstacles against its smooth functioning as a capacity building intervention. Indications, as reported in Chapter Five of this thesis, are that within the same district, some clusters were apparently more resilient and more learning-enriched. Thus, there is need for further research into what makes such clusters more resilient than clusters such as Chikanda. Such research might address the themes of organisational structure, people's attitudes, the generation of material resources, utilisation of local human resources, and so on.

Third, this chapter has identified the donor dependency syndrome as one of the factors inhibiting decentralised school governance in Chikanda cluster. This suggests that, notwithstanding having significantly contributed to the funding of the education system, and by so doing playing a pivotal role in the country's attempts towards achieving its educational goals, the donor intervention left an unintended legacy of dependency. There is need for further research into stakeholders' understandings and experiences of the role of donors in the education system. Further, impacts of donor funding on local capacity for change and self-reliance need to be systematically studied so that the necessary preventative and ameliorative steps can be taken to address them. Knowledge generated from such investigations may be useful guidance, not only to future donors but also to policy makers and implementers.

Fourth, this study has found that the higher tiers of the education system, namely, district, provincial and national offices, in the country pose a significant barrier to decentralisation. The explanation for this finding seems to be two-pronged. First, these offices cannot idly watch the system collapsing due to failures at a lower tier (for example, in schools) to function effectively in a decentralised system. They have a responsibility to correct the situation in the interests of the country. Second, decentralisation 'steals the thunder' from officials in the higher tiers, therefore they curtail the trend. These possible explanations suggest the need for further research into how those in the higher echelons of the education system understand and respond to decentralisation, and ways to balance the centralisation and devolution

tendencies. Such research is necessary in the light of the finding that in almost all education systems elements of both centralisation and decentralisation necessarily exist, only in varying degrees. Therefore, decentralisation (the periphery) needs the support of the higher offices (the centre). Such studies could spring from the current study, which touched on the experiences of some stakeholders at district and regional offices.

In ending this arduous research journey, whose route I called 'Negotiating roles and responsibilities in the context of decentralised school governance: A case study of one cluster of schools in Zimbabwe', I conclude that governance is about who decides, and that decentralising school governance is a noble idea, because it is consistent with the notion of good governance. However, this innovation can only succeed through co-operation between those in higher echelons and those in the grassroots of the education system. The former must be prepared to share decision-making power with the latter, and in turn, grassroots stakeholders need to have the capacity to effectively utilise that power for implementing decentralised school governance.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE Letter to the Provincial Education Director

University of Natal
School of Education (Durban)
Durban, 4041 South Africa
Telephone +27 (0) 31 260 1024

2 December 2003

The Director of Education
Masvingo Province
Zimbabwe

Dear Sir

**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH:
Mr V. Chikoko**

Mr Vitallis Chikoko is a PhD student in the School of Education of this university. He is studying the decentralisation of the management of education in Zimbabwe and the role of the Better Schools Programme (BSPZ) in this process.

He is interested in studying a cluster of schools in the Gutu district of Masvingo province. His data collection entails that he frequently visits the selected schools during the course of 2004 and possibly during part of 2005.

He thus needs your permission to carry out this study. Kindly assist him accordingly.

Yours sincerely

Dr Relebohile Moletsane
(Supervisor)

APPENDIX TWO Letter to the District Education Director

University of Natal
School of Education (Durban)
Durban, 4041 South Africa
Telephone +27 (0) 31 260 2611

13 November 2003

The District Education Director
Gutu District
Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Dear Sir

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: Mr Vitallis Chikoko

My name is Vitallis Chikoko. I am a PhD student in the School of Education of the University of Natal (Durban).

In fulfilment of the requirements of the said degree, I intend to conduct a study on the decentralisation of school governance in one cluster of schools in the Gutu district. I thus write to seek your permission in this regard.

I promise that upon your granting me permission, the information I shall gather shall be used solely for research purposes and shall be treated in strict confidence. All participating schools and respondents shall be referred to through pseudonyms.

Attached please find a letter of permission granted to me by the Deputy Provincial Education Director, Masvingo Province.

I wish to thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely

Vitallis Chikoko

APPENDIX THREE Letter to School Heads

University of Natal
School of Education (Durban)
Durban, 4041 South Africa
Telephone +27 (0) 31 260 2611

13 November 2003

The School Head
----- Primary School
Gutu

Dear Sir

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: Mr Vitallis
Chikoko

My name is Vitallis Chikoko. I am a PhD student in the School of Education of the University of Natal (Durban).

In fulfilment of the requirements of the said degree, I intend to conduct a study on the decentralisation of school governance in your cluster of schools. I thus write to seek your permission to include your school as one of the participants in the study, and to invite you as one of the participating school heads.

I promise that upon your granting me permission, the information I shall gather will be used solely for research purposes and shall be treated in strict confidence. All participating schools and respondents shall be referred to through pseudonyms.

Attached please find a letter of permission granted to me by the Deputy Provincial Education Director, Masvingo Province.

I wish to thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely

Vitallis Chikoko

APPENDIX FOUR Informed Consent Letter: School Stakeholders

University of Natal
School of Education (Durban)
Durban, 4041 South Africa
Telephone +27 (0) 31 260 2611

13 November 2003

Dear colleague

RE: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY: The Decentralisation of School Governance in a Cluster of Schools in the Gutu District of Masvingo Province.

My name is Vitallis Chikoko. I am a PhD student in the School of Education of the University of Natal (Durban).

In fulfilment of the requirements of the said degree, I intend to conduct a study on the decentralisation of school governance in your cluster of schools. The study involves investigating, through a questionnaire and interviews, stakeholders' understandings, experiences and responses to decentralised school governance. Stakeholders in this case include teachers, school heads and parents.

I thus write to request you to participate in this study as one of the respondents.

Please note that participating in the study is voluntary, and that you are free to discontinue your participation at any time. I undertake to treat all the information you provide in strict confidence and to use it for research purposes only. Your name or any of your identity shall not be disclosed.

Attached please find a letter of permission granted to me by the Deputy Provincial Education Director, Masvingo Province.

I wish to thank you in advance. Please sign the consent form below if you are willing to participate in the study.

I -----, fully understand the conditions of participating in this study and agree to be a respondent.

Signed:

Date:

I, Vitallis Chikoko, the researcher, undertake to treat all the information provided by the respondent in strict confidence and for the sole purpose of research.

Signed:

Date:

APPENDIX FIVE Questionnaire Cover Letter

University of Natal
School of Education (Durban)
Durban, 4041 South Africa
Telephone +27 (0) 31 260 2611

13 November, 2003

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST TO ANSWER THE ATTACHED QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is Vitallis Chikoko. I am currently a PhD student in the School of Education of the University of Natal, (Durban).

In fulfillment of the requirements for the said degree, I am conducting a study on the extent and impact of the decentralisation of school governance in Zimbabwe. Decentralisation, in this case refers to the process in which central government gives schools more power to run their own affairs. The study focuses on two key areas, namely, the nature of decision-making and the role of the Better Schools Programme in staff developing personnel in schools. The study is restricted to your cluster of schools. Within the cluster, I wish to gather the views of all teachers. Thus I invite you to participate in the study by answering all the questions in the attached questionnaire.

I undertake that the information you provide shall be treated in strict confidence and shall serve the purposes of this study only. Your personal identity is not required, thus, sources of all information shall be anonymous.

I wish to thank you in advance.

Yours sincerely

Vitallis Chikoko

APPENDIX SIX Teacher Focus Group Interview Schedule

1. What is your understanding of school governance?
2. What is your understanding of decentralised school governance?
3. Who would you say are the key participants in school governance in this school, cluster? How?
4. Which do you consider to be the key areas of school governance, why?
5. How would you describe school governance in this school, centralised? Decentralised? Why?
6. How would you describe your own involvement in school governance?
7. In your opinion, are teachers, school heads and parents capable of school governance?
8. What role does the cluster play in school governance?
9. What do you experience as some of the factors enabling/hindering decentralised school governance?
10. What are some of your key concerns regarding school governance in this school?

APPENDIX SEVEN Parent Focus Group Interview Schedule

1. What do you understand by school governance?
2. As parents, what is your role in school governance?
3. Do you feel capable in playing school governance roles?
4. What competences do you need and how are these being addressed?
5. From your experience in this school, who are the key participants in school governance?
6. To what extent do you work together with the school development committee, teachers and the school head in matters of school governance?

APPENDIX EIGHT School Development Committee Interview Schedule

1. What is the role of the School Development Committee in this school?
2. How often do you as a committee meet per school term?
3. What is your understanding of school governance?
4. What is your understanding of decentralised school governance?
5. Who do you perceive as the key participants in school governance in the school, why?
6. How would you describe your working relationships with each of the following stakeholders: the two ministries of Education, Sports and Culture; and Local Government and Public Works; teachers, the school head, parents and committees of other schools in this cluster?
7. As a committee, do you feel capable of performing school governance duties?
8. To what extent does the Better Schools Programme assist you in developing school governance competences?
9. What do you consider as some of the factors enabling/hindering decentralised school governance?

APPENDIX NINE School Heads Interview Schedule

1. What is your understanding of school governance?
2. What is your understanding of decentralised school governance?
3. Do you feel school governance in Zimbabwe is centralised/decentralised? Why?
4. How would you describe your role in school governance?
5. Who do you consider as the major players in decentralising school governance, why?
6. Do you feel capable of performing school governance duties?
7. If yes, what are your areas of strength? If not, what are your areas of deficiency?
8. What do you consider as the role of the cluster system and the Better Schools Programme in school governance?
9. How would you describe your working relationships with teachers, parents, the School Development Committee, and other schools in the cluster, regarding school governance?
10. What do you see as some of the factors enabling/hindering decentralised school governance?

APPENDIX TEN Education Officials Interview Schedule

1. What is your understanding of decentralised school governance?
2. As an education official, what do you consider as your role in decentralised school governance?
3. Who do you consider as key players in achieving decentralised school governance, why?
4. How useful is the school cluster system in the process of decentralising school governance?
5. How would you describe school governance in Zimbabwe, centralised/decentralised, why?
6. As an official, do you feel competent to implement decentralised school governance?
7. What do you consider as some of the factors enabling/hindering decentralisation of school governance?

APPENDIX ELEVEN Teacher Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

This questionnaire is made up of three sections (A-C). Please answer all sections.

SECTION A : BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Please tick in the appropriate box.

1. **SEX**

M

F

2. **POST OF RESPONSIBILITY (IF ANY)**

Deputy Head

Head of Department

Sports coordinator

Senior teacher

Other: Please specify: _____

4. TEACHING EXPERIENCE

0-5 yrs

6 – 10 yrs

11 – 15 yrs

16 or more yrs

4. LENGTH OF SERVICE AT THIS SCHOOL

0 – 5 yrs

6 – 10 yrs

11 – 15 yrs

16 or more yrs

SECTION B: DECISION – MAKING ON SCHOOL MATTERS

For each item, please use the 0-4 rating scale provided to show (a) under decisional location; the extent to which authority to make decisions about that item has been decentralized to the school level and (b) under level of involvement; the extent to which you are involved in making decisions about that item. Please tick in the appropriate box.

KEY TO THE RATING SCALE:

- 0: Not at all
- 1: Little extent
- 2: Average extent
- 3: Large extent
- 4: Total extent

DECISIONAL ITEMS	Decisional location					Additional Comment(s)
	0	1	2	3	4	
PUPIL ADMISSIONS						
5. Entry age						
6. Other entry qualifications						
SCHOOL ORGANIZATION						
7. School time table						
8. Class sizes						
9. Administration structure						
10. Subject clusters						

CURRICULUM						
11. Lesson planning and scheming						
12. Instructional methods						
13. Selection of textbooks						
14. Assessment of pupils						
MONITORING						
15. Pupil promotion						
16. Pupil discipline						
17. Class composition e.g. streaming						
FINANCIAL RESOURCES						
19. Charging fees and levies						
20. Budgeting						
21. Fund raising						

HUMAN RESOURCES						
22. Hiring and firing of staff						
23. Staff development/In service training						
24. Staff performance appraisal						
MATERIAL RESOURCES						
25. Resource Procurement						
26. Resource Allocation						
INFORMATION						
27. Dissemination of information on school activities						
28. Dissemination of information on school performance						

SECTION C: THE BETTER SCHOOLS PROGRAMME OF ZIMBABWE (BSPZ) AS A CAPACITY-BUILDER

The following are some of the objectives of the BSPZ. Using the same rating scale as in Section B above, please rate each objective in terms of how well the BSPZ is coping in trying to achieve the objective. Please tick in the appropriate box.

	0	1	2	3	4
29. Developing teachers' competencies in teaching					
30. Developing school heads' competences in school management					
31. Upgrading school heads' supervisory skills					
32. Establishing an organisational structure to sustain continuous staff development					
33. Developing a pool of effective trainers for in-service training programmes					
34. Extending the role of SDCs from that of just providing physical infrastructure to full partners in the school system					
35. Developing a pool of researchers to assist in guiding policy and educational practice					
36. Improving the overall quality of education in schools					

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

APPENDIX TWELVE Summary of Interview, Observation and Document

Analysis Schedules

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Interviews are planned for the following stakeholder groupings: school heads, chairpersons of School Development Committees (SDCs), chairperson of the cluster management committee, some teachers, the District Education Officer, the BSPZ district resource teacher, and the District Council Chief Executive Officer.

What follows are key focus areas for interviews with each group/individual.

1. School heads and teachers

- 1.1 their understanding of decentralisation of school governance
- 1.2 the nature of school governance competences required in a decentralised context
- 1.3 perceptions of their and other stakeholders' capacities to function effectively in a decentralised school governance system
- 1.4 barriers to successful decentralisation
- 1.5 the role of the Better schools Programme in decentralisation
- 1.6 the roles of each of the ministries of Education, Sport and Culture; and that of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing in the decentralisation process
- 1.7 the overall impact of decentralisation on efficiency and effectiveness in school management.

2. Chairpersons of SDCs

- 2.1 school governance activities currently undertaken and those envisaged
- 2.2 perceptions of their and other stakeholders' capacities to effectively perform school governance activities
- 2.3 barriers to successful decentralisation of school governance

3. Chairperson of the cluster management committee

- 3.1 cluster activities
- 3.2 impact of cluster activities on schooleffectiveness and efficiency
- 3.3 barriers to successful cluster activities

4. District Education Officer

- 4.1 understanding of the decentralisation process
- 4.2 roles of various stakeholders in the decentralisation of education
- 4.3 the impact of the BSPZ
- 4.4 barriers to successful decentralisation

5. Rural District Council Chief Executive

5.1 perceptions of the role of the council as a responsible authority of the public schools in the district

5.2 barriers to successful decentralisation

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Because every school is unique in the way things are run, no single formula is possible in conducting observations. However schools also have commonalities, for example, many planning meetings are held during the beginning of the academic year, the time when data for this study shall be collected. Thus, many meetings are envisaged to be observed. The following is the general pattern planned to be followed:

1. collection of individual school calendars and time tables and booking to attend sessions
2. familiarisation with the school settings and routines, eg attending school assemblies, observing staff room behaviour
3. observing staff meetings
4. school development committee meetings
5. some department meetings
6. cluster meetings
7. lessons
8. staff development activities

At the end of each observation day, summaries of observations shall be made. These shall point at the nature and focus of the next series of observations.

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS SCHEDULE

Documents relevant to this study are envisaged to fall into two broad categories, those that are public and can only be analysed as and when they arise, such as notices, and those that have to be requested, such as minutes. The former shall be constantly watched and analysed as soon as they are available. In each case, the focus shall be on what message the document portrays with regard to the nature of decision-making therein.

1. notices
2. mission and vision statements
3. sign posts
4. BSPZ policy documents
5. minutes of academic staff meetings
6. minutes of school development committee meetings

7. minutes of cluster meetings
8. circulars
9. students' records
- 10 school records of achievement