

Strengthening Accountability and Participation: School Self-Assessment in Namibia

School Self-Assessments

Communities around the world are being encouraged to participate in the work and management of their schools. This participation may involve school boards, management committees, financial and in-kind contributions, and school improvement projects. In six northern regions of Namibia, communities participate in developing and implementing school improvement plans. The school self-assessment (SSA) system is a core tool that helps communities and parents contribute constructively to educational improvement, an innovative approach that:

- Encourages 360 degree accountability: school to parents, parents to school, school to circuit and region, and region and circuit to school;
- Informs curriculum revision and policy analysis at all educational levels;
- Fosters school improvement by developing local capacity for thoughtful practice and analysis;
- Is an active learning method that involves parents and teachers in all aspects of the improvement process;
- Offers supervisors, teachers, and parents opportunities to discuss ways to improve school quality; and
- Can be used to measure the impact of donor projects.

Parents Participate in Namibian Schools

Why don't more parents participate in school improvements? One reason is the widespread belief that they cannot offer any meaningful support. In the Kavango Region of northern Namibia, parents and teachers are proving this assumption wrong by assessing school performance and identifying activities for a school improvement plan (SIP).

As shown in the photograph, SIP resource teacher Mrs. Shipapo and Mr. Kwando, a parent, review a bar graph that depicts answers to SSA questions. Mr. Kwando suggests that the score for the school climate category include rankings of such statements as "the school promotes learner achievement" and "learners and parents report the school is a caring place."

Parents go on to discuss how they can help ensure a positive school climate and decide to work more closely with the principal to get their children to school on time every day. The parents, teachers, principal, and resource teacher review the other 10 SSA categories in the same way.

By the end of the meeting, parents have proposed various collective activities to improve their children's school. One parent tells Mrs. Shipapo that "the picture of the bars is easier to understand than all those written words."



Four Summaries of Assessment Findings

1. The School Report provides summary ratings of 11 indicators for each school.
2. The School Comparative Report compares school and observer rankings.
3. The Circuit Report compares school rankings to regional averages.
4. The Regional Summary compares school rankings in different circuits to identify regional problems.

SSAs in Namibia

The SSA system in Namibia was developed to respond to the Ministry of Education’s need to monitor and evaluate education results despite its chronic lack of funds. Previously, the Ministry used biannual sample-based studies by the National Institute for Education Development. Though these studies provided useful insights, they were too infrequent, small, and narrowly focused. The Education Minister instead wanted to adopt the SSA system used in the Seychelles, which provided timely and ongoing information from all schools in that country, including their perceived strengths and weaknesses. The USAID-funded Basic Education Support Project, Phase II (BES II) in Namibia provided the Ministry with technical assistance to develop the system.

Purpose and Outcomes of SSAs

Namibia’s reforms to improve school quality are based on two pillars:

1. Community participation in developing school improvement plans
2. Effective classroom practices based on active learning and continuous assessment

Active learning and continuous assessment challenge classroom teachers and school directors to think differently and acquire new sets of skills. These practices also require substantial and continuous engagement at the school level to develop common norms and expectations.

SIPs are the centerpiece of Namibia’s school reforms. Developing SIPs entails annual collaboration between school staff, parents, and supervisors with the goal of sustaining schools with standards of continuous improvement. Circuit support teams of supervisors and resource teachers facilitate the process and provide teacher training.

SSA Components

Teacher/Principal Self-Assessments

These self-assessment forms allow teachers and principals to review their strengths and weaknesses. The information is not disclosed—only identified priority training needs are shared with the rest of the school.

School Self-Assessments

These assessments are developed through a discussion-based process guided by the SSA that rates school practices and identifies areas for improvement. The discussion focuses on ranking 11 key factors on a four-point scale:

- School Climate
- School Management
- Professional Development
- School Planning
- Teacher Attitude

- Classroom Management
- Learner-Centered Education
- Continuous Assessment
- School Support for Parent Involvement
- Parent Activities
- Educational System Inputs

Each factor has eight to 10 specific indicators stated in simple language, such as “high learning goals are set for students,” “teachers are respectful of students,” and “parents are welcome in the school.” Combined indicator scores provide a single ranking for each factor, which are publicized in the school report. See Appendix 1 for more details.

Observer Assessments

The circuit team of inspectors or resource teachers uses the same indicators to provide an independent school assessment that is based on a set of objective criteria. The process provides a degree of quality control and an objective measurement of school quality. See Appendix 2 for more details.

Circuit Team Self-Assessments

The circuit team assesses its own performance and capacity, identifying its training and support needs. These assessments are summarized and shared with regional education officers who obtain overviews of the team’s school support activities from quarterly reports. See Appendix 3 for more details.

Results

The SSA system provides positive results for all stakeholders:

- Teachers and principals identify the professional capacities they need to master.
- Parents and communities learn how to improve their schools and identify specific actions.
- Parents and communities can measure advances and compare their assessments to the inspector’s and those of other schools.
- Circuit teams recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the schools and identify priority needs for support.
- Regional education officers are informed on circuit team performance, school progress, and school comparisons and can identify steps moving forward.

Advantages of SSA

The SSA system provides a low-cost and highly participatory way to track performance and improvement in all schools. SSA enables community members to offer support to schools and facilitates substantive collaboration between parents and teachers. It helps create meaningful and common standards of performance and expectations and promotes professional development for teachers, principals, and supervisors. SSA is also a useful tool for regional and circuit managers, providing a systematic and objective measure of classroom practice.

Keys to Success

- A significant amount of training is needed at the school and circuit level to complete the first self-assessment and school improvement plan.
- The analysis must be available and easy to understand at the school and circuit levels.
- The purpose of the assessment must be constructive, not punitive. It must also be as anonymous as possible. Only broad summary measures should go to the circuit and regional directors. No individual or school should be identifiable for criticism.
- Circuit supervisors must conduct comparative quality control assessments that are used in school discussions.
- Schools and communities must develop their own norms and standards and eventually achieve consensus with others.

SSA Challenges

Negative assessments that are used to judge and penalize underperforming schools may provide an incentive for false reporting. However, false reporting was not found to be a problem in Namibia. Nevertheless, outside observation and quality control are required. Complete and honest self-reflection is difficult, and SSA data and standards are, therefore, less absolute than those provided by outside evaluators with established certification criteria.

References

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Appendix 1: Sample SSA Climate Survey

A. Indicators	4	3	2	1	Total
1. The school community shows respect for teachers, learners, parents, and the principal.		X			
2. Principal and teachers regularly express confidence in learners' ability to succeed.	X				
3. The school promotes learner achievement through regular awards, announcements, and activities.				X	
4. Learners and parents report that the school is a caring place.		X			
5. Teachers demonstrate that they are dedicated to the school and to the learners.		X			
6. Principals and teachers talk to learners outside of class, demonstrating concern.		X			
7. School has displays of learner and school achievement.				X	
8. The principal is dedicated to the general success of the school.	X				
9. School facilities and premises are clean and orderly.			X		
10. Principal and teachers respect and adhere to rules on tardiness, attendance, and class schedules.			X		
Total (sum of each column)	8	12	4	2	26
Summary Score – School Climate (divide total by 10)					2.6

B. Discussion of School Climate	
What aspects make us most proud?	What aspects do we need to work on the most?
<p>The teachers are very dedicated to the learners and the school. They are highly motivated and often stay after school to help learners with problems. The teachers know the family situations of the learners and try to help. The teachers really care about the learners.</p> <p>Because of the principal's work, the school has excellent relations with the community.</p> <p>The community considers the school to be an important resource.</p>	<p>We all need to work harder on workplace discipline, particularly in teacher and principal attendance and tardiness. Too often, educators arrive late or miss class entirely, reducing time for learners.</p> <p>We also need to work hard at keeping up the school's orderly and clean appearance. Sometimes, it becomes messy.</p> <p>We do not have a regular awards program to recognize learner excellence.</p>

C. Actions We Can Take	
What three things can we do this year that will most improve our school climate?	
Principal	Establish an awards program.
Teachers	Do not be tardy more than once a month.
Parents	Help clean the school.
Learners	Help keep the classroom clean

D. Assistance Needed
What do we need from the circuit support team?
Ideas and assistance in setting up a learner-recognition program that includes awards and activities.

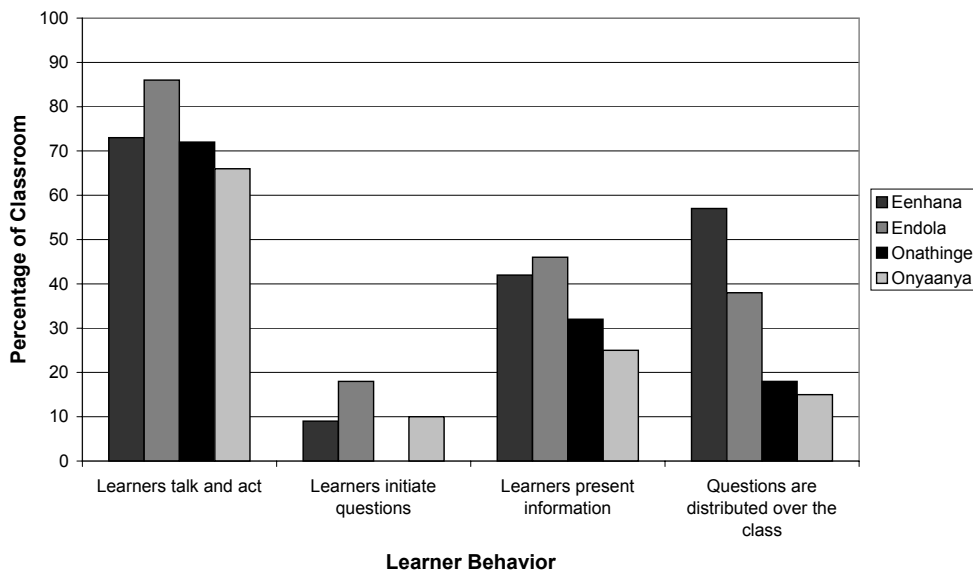
Appendix 2: Sample School Comparative Report

Bukalo Primary School Summary

Indicator	School Rating	Observer Rating
School Climate	3.1	2
Management Practices	2.9	3
Professional Development	3.8	2
School Planning	3	3
Parent Involvement	2.7	2
Parent Activities	3.2	2
Teacher Attitude	4	3
Classroom Management	3.8	4
LCE	3.7	2.3
Continuous Assessment	4	2.8
Outside Support	3.8	3

Appendix 3: Sample Regional Summary of Four Circuits

Indications that Learners are Actively Engaged



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