The Role of Pupils in School Governance

Why should pupils participate in governance?

Some people think children should only be in school to study, and should not be involved in governance. They say that children are not mature enough to be involved in important decision-making. But there are good reasons for pupils to be involved. Some of these are:

- Pupils have insights. Children in school know what is going on, and can contribute practical ideas for change. For example, they can tell if school rules are well used, which teachers are punctual in the classroom, and what can be done to make the school a better place.
- Pupils learn by doing. By participating in decision-making, children learn valuable life skills about how to balance different interests, argue a case, and make a presentation. Pupils will learn how democracy works, and use these skills at home and in the community.
- Participation creates ownership. Pupils who have been involved in creating something are much more likely to understand it, see its importance and be committed to it. For example, pupils who have been involved in discussions on changes that affect them are more likely to agree with a change, and work to make it happen.
- Participation is a right. Pupils are full human beings and have certain basic rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by many countries, states that children have the right to education, to make decisions about their lives, and to participate in society.
- Pupils are more likely to be fair and respectful. When pupils are involved in decision-making, they are more likely to weigh different interests, argue a case, and make a presentation. Pupils who have been involved in decision-making are more likely to be fair and respectful.
- Pupils have the right to information. Everyone has a right to information, and everyone has a right to know about pupil participation in PEDP. Now that you know what PEDP says about pupil participation, you can see if it is happening in your community, ask questions if it is not, and give constructive ideas on how to make things work better.

What does PEDP say about Pupils and Governance?

PEDP explicitly recognizes the importance of pupils to participate in school governance through Pupils’ Councils and School Barazas. The PEDP Appendix on this is reproduced fully here (see box).

According to PEDP, pupils involved in governance have the following roles:

- Represent views and interests of all pupils, including marginalized and those with special needs, in school governance and decision-making and in the school committee.
- Contribute to developing and monitoring school plans and use of funds.
- Communicate information between school/village management and pupils.

This policy guideline provides pupils with the right to be heard and an opportunity to improve their school. Pupils will also need to be responsible. They need to act in a way that is thoughtful, fair, respectful and inclusive, especially of those whose voice is not normally heard. The guideline provides for a teacher, preferably chosen by the pupils themselves, to guide the pupils in a facilitative manner. School committees need to ensure all aspects of PEDP, including pupil participation, are properly implemented.

How can I follow up?

Everyone has a right to information, and everyone has a right to know about pupil participation in PEDP. Now that you know what PEDP says about pupil participation, you can see if it is happening in your community, ask questions if it is not and give constructive ideas on how to make things work better.

For example, you can ask the Pupils’ Council if this is happening in your school. Ask if the Pupils’ Council has been meeting in your school, and how its members were democratically elected by their fellow pupils. You have a right to ask questions, and get clear answers.

According to Government reforms, it is no longer acceptable for leaders just to give orders and not listen to the people. Of course change takes time, and one cannot expect everything to be perfect right away. But you have a right to see progress being made.

You can get information on PEDP from the head teacher, District Education Office, your Ward Counsellor or Member of Parliament. You can ask for information at the Village/Mtaa Assembly or at Council meetings. You can also ask NGOs that are active in your area, or contact Hakielimu.