



# The Politics and Governance of Basic Education

*A Tale of Two South African Provinces*

EDITED BY

Brian Levy, Robert Cameron,  
Ursula Hoadley, and Vinothan Naidoo

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# 7

## Context and Capability

### A Tale of Two Bureaucracies

*Brian Levy, Robert Cameron, and Vinothan Naidoo*

#### 7.1 Introduction

Chapters 4 and 5 examined in depth the workings of the Western Cape and Eastern Cape education bureaucracies. Even though the two provinces operate within an identical inter-governmental framework, they differ starkly from one another in their socio-economic, political and institutional contexts. They thus provide an ideal platform for exploring comparatively some fundamental questions concerning the relationship between context and bureaucracy.

In what ways does context shape how bureaucracies operate? Where bureaucracy is relatively weak, to what extent does context constrain the prospects for improving performance? Where bureaucratic capability is relatively strong but politics turns toxic, to what extent can bureaucracy serve as a brake on a downward spiral? Can participatory 'horizontal' governance help improve public service provision—both as a complement to a relatively strong bureaucracy, and as a substitute in settings where capability is weak? Building on the empirical platform provided by the earlier chapters, this chapter explores these questions.

#### 7.2 Two Divergent Bureaucracies

We begin by summarizing some of the findings from earlier chapters as to the quality of the education bureaucracy in the two provinces. Table 7.1 reports the results for 2012/13 of Management Performance Assessment Tests (MPATs) for the Departments of education in the Western Cape, the Eastern

## The Politics and Governance of Basic Education

**Table 7.1.** MPAT Assessments of South Africa’s Education Departments (selected provinces 2012/13; distribution of scores, by level for assessed key performance areas)

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Western Cape	0	21	34	45
Gauteng	14	21	31	34
National average, all provinces	24	31	31	15
Northern Cape	28	41	28	3
Eastern Cape	59	17	17	7

*Notes:* Level 1—non-compliance with legal/regulatory requirements; Level 2—partial compliance with legal/regulatory requirements; Level 3—full compliance with legal/regulatory requirement; Level 4—full compliance, and doing this smartly.

*Source:* The Presidency, 2013.

Cape and two other provinces. The MPATs, sponsored by South Africa’s Department of Policy Monitoring and Evaluation, located in the office of the Presidency, benchmark over a hundred national and provincial government departments against a variety of key performance indicators. As the table suggests, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) was rated as the best managed of the country’s nine provinces (Gauteng rated second). The Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) rated the weakest (the Northern Cape rated second weakest (The Presidency, 2013).

Good bureaucratic processes need not, however, translate into good results. Along with managerial quality, educational outcomes comprise another relevant benchmark for assessing the performance of departments of education. Here, too, as Table 7.2 shows, the Western Cape benchmarks well against other South African provinces.

Table 7.2 summarizes some scores from standardized tests administered in 2007 to a large sample of sixth graders in fifteen countries by the independent Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ).<sup>1</sup> As the table suggests, the Western Cape was the top performer among South Africa’s nine provinces, with Gauteng a close second; the Eastern Cape was the weakest performer. The ranking of provinces is similar whether one takes the median score, the score for learners at the seventy-fifth percentile of socio-economic distribution, or the score for learners at the lower, twenty-fifth percentile, socio-economic tier. As Chapter 6 explored econometrically, the Western Cape remained the strongest SACMEQ performer among South Africa’s nine provinces even after controlling for a variety of exogenous influences on performance. (Note that scores for Kenya also are included in the table and that relative to Kenya the Western Cape does not benchmark as well. Possible reasons for this, and its implications, are considered further in the final section of this chapter.)

<sup>1</sup> The South African SACMEQ sample comprised 9,083 students drawn from 392 schools; sample size per province ranged from 900 to 1,500 observations (RSA, 2010).

**Table 7.2.** The Western Cape's SACMEQ Scores in Comparative Perspective

	50th percentile (median)	25th percentile	75th percentile
Western Cape	560	496	636
Gauteng	548	483	610
Eastern Cape	454	408	509
South Africa (overall)	483	424	548
Kenya	548	509	610
Kenya (Nairobi)	585	535	662

Note: achievement in Grade 6 mathematics and home language by province, 2007.

Source: SACMEQ data files (2007) RSA, DBE (2010).

Corresponding to the differences between the two provinces in performance, the modes of operation of the two bureaucracies also were starkly different. We characterize these differences using the 2×2 governance framework introduced in Chapter 1 and applied in Table 7.3 below. One dimension of the framework comprises whether governance arrangements are hierarchical (that is, organized around vertical relationships between 'principals' and 'agents'), or whether they are negotiated (that is, organized around horizontal 'principal–principal'/peer-to-peer arrangements). The second dimension distinguishes among governance arrangements according to whether they are based on impersonal rules of the game, which are applied impartially to all who have standing, or whether they are organized around personalized 'deals' among influential actors. This gives us four distinct (and familiar) patterns of bureaucratic operation.

The first two patterns build on a foundation of impersonal rules. The first of these, *hierarchical-impersonal bureaucracy*, captured in the top-right cells of Table 7.3, is the classic mode of rule-governed bureaucracy delineated by Max Weber (1922) as the mechanism through which government pursues public purposes and partially 'modernized' in recent decades under the rubric of New Public Management (NPM).<sup>2</sup> The second (though not strictly speaking an example of bureaucracy), captured in the bottom-right cells of the table, comprises a form of 'corporatism'—formal processes through which multiple principals agree collectively on codified rules of the game for policymaking and implementation.

<sup>2</sup> There is a strand of NPM which advocates giving managers greater autonomy in order to achieve results (Hughes, 2003). This version of management would perhaps fall in the *hierarchical-personalized* cell. It has also been argued that NPM in South Africa, particularly performance management, is less about management reform and more about asserting new forms of political control over the bureaucracy, (Cameron, 2009, 2010).

For an in-depth comparative analysis on public management NPM in high-income, OECD countries, and its limitations, see Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011). For similar studies in developing countries see Schick (1998) and Manning (2001).



The third and fourth patterns operate on the basis of informal, de facto rules of the game. *Hierarchical-personalized bureaucracy*, the top-left cell, is similar in part to Weberian bureaucracy insofar as the mode of organization is hierarchical, and thus governed via nested principal–agent relationships—but here compliance on the part of agents follows from the personalized authority of the leadership, rather than a system of rules; the system is one of patronage. Merilee Grindle, in her 2012 book *Jobs for the Boys*, underscores ‘the fatal weakness of patronage systems is not that they are inevitably incompetent, but that they are capricious’<sup>3</sup>—unconstrained by rules, and thus subject to the preferences of the hierarchical leadership.

In the final pattern, *fragmented-personalized bureaucracy* (in the bottom-left cells), neither formal rules nor a well-defined hierarchy of authority are in place. Appointments into public positions are politicized, with the right to appoint distributed across political factions; appointees generally focus their efforts on serving the interests of their various patrons. Where intermediate- and lower-level officials are committed to developmental goals and are skilful in nurturing alliances among internal and external stakeholders, they may be able to create ‘islands of effectiveness’. But in this pattern, overall effectiveness is low.

As Chapter 4 explored in depth, viewed through the lens of the above framework the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) emerges as disproportionately ‘hierarchical-impersonal’. It has a strong professional orientation among both the administrative bureaucracy and teaching staff. Turnover among the senior bureaucratic officials has been low, insulating the bureaucracy in significant part from the cycles of political change, including the rapid turnover of the provincial-cabinet-level appointments of political heads (i.e. the provincial ministers of education). Throughout two decades of democratic government, the WCED has endeavoured to put in place results-oriented approaches to performance management. It consistently worked to implement the ongoing stream of results-oriented systems reform initiatives which emanated from the national level, and complemented them with a variety of more home-grown initiatives (implemented especially vigorously under the Democratic Alliance (DA) administration which has governed the province since 2009). These include sophisticated computerized tools for managing budgets, staffing and procurement, school improvement plans (SIPs) for each of the provinces 1,500 schools, and online tracking systems for monitoring the progress of individual learners through the WCED system, and (on a quarterly basis), the progress of schools in implementing their SIPs.

<sup>3</sup> Grindle (2012: 32).

**Table 7.3.** Characterizing Education Bureaucracies—Two Contrasting Patterns

<i>A: Western Cape</i>			<i>Eastern Cape</i>		
Hierarchical	15–20%	60–65%	Hierarchical	20–25%	5–15%
Negotiated	5–10%	5–15%	Negotiated	40–50%	20–25%
	Personalized	Impersonal		Personalized	Impersonal

Source: chapters 4 and 5.

The left-hand side of Table 7.3 provides an heuristic summary of the Western Cape bureaucracy in terms of the two governance dimensions highlighted above, allocating 100 points across the four cells.<sup>4</sup> For reasons delineated in Chapter 4, the Western Cape bureaucracy is depicted in the table as predominantly, but not exclusively, impersonal and hierarchical: the top leadership of the bureaucracy exerts discretionary authority over some decisions; other decisions are painstakingly negotiated between the bureaucracy and other stakeholders (including teachers’ trade unions) through tightly formalized processes. Yet overall, the Western Cape is an exemplar of a well-managed, hierarchically oriented and rule-bound bureaucracy.

By contrast, the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) resembles more closely the ‘fragmented personalized’ pattern of bureaucratic operation. As Chapter 5 detailed, it has been bedevilled by divergent and competing regional interests, organizational cultures, and patronage ties which consistently defied centralized control. Since 1994 the ECDoE has experienced repeated leadership turnover, and a general flouting of centralized authority. Obstacles to enforcing management control and sustaining leadership continuity have contributed to chronic weaknesses in both financial and personnel management. In March 2011 national government intervened, and temporarily took over administration of the ECDoE. But this did not stem the crisis. Provincial politics proved too powerful. After a few years, intervention was scaled back, having had only a limited impact.

The right-hand side of Table 7.3 characterizes the Eastern Cape pattern heuristically by allocating about two-thirds of the percentage points to the personalized column. Mirroring the fragmentation of the bureaucracy, the bulk (but, again, not all<sup>5</sup>) of these are in the negotiated rather than hierarchical cell.

<sup>4</sup> Ranges are used to signal the heuristic nature of the allocation across cells.

<sup>5</sup> The ECDoE does more-or-less deliver on some core bureaucratic functions. Teachers are paid; some (but not all) schools receive textbooks; most (but not all) school buildings are maintained.

### 7.3 Accounting for the Divergent Bureaucratic Patterns

This section explores how context influences bureaucracy. Bureaucratic behaviour and performance are interpreted as endogenous, shaped by decisions of political elites as to whether to direct their efforts towards providing public services or for more narrowly political or private purposes—with the incentives and decisions of political elites shaped in turn by ‘exogenous’ variables. Viewed from this perspective, the divergences in behaviour of the Western Cape and Eastern Cape education bureaucracies laid out in section 7.2 can be attributed to differences in context across the two provinces.

Applying the analytical framework laid out in Chapter 1, Table 7.4 groups the relevant contextual differences between the Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces into three categories—socio-economic, political and institutional. The discussion which follows provides detail on each of these, and identifies four causal mechanisms which link the contextual variables identified in the table to bureaucratic behaviour and performance, distinguishing between demand-side and supply-side influences.

#### 7.3.1 Demand-Side Pressures for Performance

The first two causal mechanisms highlight the influence of exogenous socio-economic and political variables on the *effectiveness* of citizens’ demands on bureaucrats and politicians for decent public services. The first mechanism comprises the well-recognized<sup>6</sup> relationship between social class and effective demand—with middle-class citizens generally better positioned than their low-income counterparts to exercise voice effectively in response to poor-quality services (and mismanagement and corruption more broadly), and thus more likely to exercise voice to pressure for better public performance.

Economically, the Western Cape was (and remains) among the wealthiest of South Africa’s nine provinces; as of 1996, its per capita income was 50 per cent higher than for the country as a whole. The Eastern Cape, by contrast, was the poorest province in the country; its per capita income has hovered at around 50–60 per cent of the national average. These differences in average income

<sup>6</sup> For some analyses of the role of a rising middle class in pressing for greater public sector accountability, see Lipset (1959), Moore (1966), Huntington (1991), Acemoglu and Robinson, (2006), Fukuyama (2014). In recent work Tim Kelsall and Matthias vom Hau (2017) refine and extend the ‘middle-class’ hypothesis by introducing the concept of a ‘social configuration’ of power, comprising those groups that can threaten the hold on power of political leadership. They hypothesize that the broader the social foundation the more inclusive will be development outcomes.

**Table 7.4.** Two Divergent Contexts

	1. Socio-economic	2. Political	3. Inherited institutions
<b>Western Cape</b>	Diverse social composition—both ethnically and by economic class	- elites dispersed across multiple political parties, with two broad groupings - competitive elections	Inheritance of ‘impersonal’ bureaucracy
<b>Eastern Cape</b>	Homogenous social composition—disproportionately poor & Xhosa-speaking	- ANC electorally dominant; - deep intra-party fragmentation	Inheritance of patronage bantustan bureaucracies

**Table 7.5.** Distribution of Social Classes in South Africa, 2014

	South Africa (all)	Western Cape	Eastern Cape
Elite	4%	5%	2%
‘Middle’ class	20	35	13
Vulnerable	14	15	10
Transient poor	13	20	5
Chronic poor	49	25	70
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

*Note:* The distribution is based on an empirical analysis of four waves of panel data collected between 2008 and 2014 by South Africa’s National Income Dynamics Study.

*Source:* Schotte, Zizzamia, and Leibbrandt (2017)

between the two provinces translate into far-reaching differences in class composition.<sup>7</sup>

Table 7.5 reports some findings from Schotte, Zizzamia, and Leibbrandt’s (2017) disaggregation of South Africa’s income distribution into five distinct social classes. Based on this disaggregation, 49 per cent of South Africa’s total population is classified as ‘chronically poor’.<sup>8</sup> In the Eastern Cape, the share of the population which is ‘chronically poor’ rises to 70 per cent. In the Western Cape, it is 25 per cent. The ‘modal’ social class in the Western Cape is the middle class (35 per cent of the total population), with the ‘vulnerable’ and

<sup>7</sup> These differences in social class composition would, of course, be magnified (or diminished) if the provinces also differed in their (intra-province) patterns of relative inequality. But the limited available evidence on provincial-level Gini coefficients suggests that these differences are relatively small.

<sup>8</sup> The high proportion of the population that is ‘chronically poor’ is not an artifact of where the benchmark is set. For one thing, over half of the income of this group comes from social grants (pensions, child support and disability), set at less than \$100 per month. For another, South Africa’s ‘chronically poor’ are notably poor when benchmarked against other middle-income countries. As Levy, Hirsch, and Woolard (2015) detail, in 2000 the poorest 40 per cent of South Africans accounted for only 5.5 per cent of expenditure, a starkly lower share than for the comparator countries (all of which have similar per capita incomes): Brazil (8.1 per cent), Mexico (11.4 per cent), Turkey (15.1 per cent) and Thailand (17.1 per cent). As of 2010, the South African share had risen to 6.9 per cent, still below the comparators.

‘transient poor’ accounting for a further 35 per cent. Insofar as there is a positive correlation between economic status and voice, then solely on the basis of these differences in class composition, non-elite citizens in the Western Cape generally are likely to be better positioned to demand better public services than are their Eastern Cape counterparts.

The second demand-side mechanism works via the electoral process. Here, the key proposition is that citizens will be better positioned to exert demand-side pressure for decent public services in settings where elections are competitive than in those where politicians can take the support (or acquiescence) of citizens for granted, independent of how well they govern.<sup>9</sup> The differences between the two provinces in electoral competitiveness are stark—for reasons which are rooted partly in demography, and partly in history.

In the Eastern Cape, 86 per cent of the 1996 population of 6.1 million was black African, almost all Xhosa-speaking. (For South Africa as a whole, the 1996 black African share of the total was 77 per cent.) In the Western Cape, by contrast, the largest ethnic subgroup of the population was (in the South African lexicon) coloured. In 1996, this group comprised 54 per cent of the 4.1 million people in the province; black Africans comprised only 21 per cent. By 2011, population in the Western Cape had risen to 5.8 million (with the increase driven in significant part by migration from the Eastern Cape), with the black African and coloured shares now comprising 33 per cent and 49 per cent, respectively.

The Western Cape’s relatively high ethnic diversity provided a platform for closely contested elections. To be sure, the province had been a major locus of opposition to apartheid and, as elsewhere in the country, most non-white anti-apartheid activists identified strongly with the African National Congress (ANC). But the distinctive ethnic characteristics of the Western Cape implied that among at least part of the population, loyalty to the ANC was not necessarily unequivocal—and insofar as the ANC framed the basis for its allegiance in narrowly ‘African nationalist’ terms, rather than an inclusive non-racialism, there was ample scope for shifting allegiances, and thus voting patterns, away from the ANC and towards the opposition DA, and other political parties.<sup>10</sup>

The result was a highly competitive provincial politics, with multiple competing political parties, and hotly contested elections. Over the course of the first two decades of democracy, seven different political parties/coalitions

<sup>9</sup> Acemoglu and Robinson (2006). Khemani (2016: chapter 5) reviews the literature on the impact of democratic political engagement on development outcomes.

<sup>10</sup> The DA elite comprised those in the upper tiers of business, the professions and the bureaucracy within the province. Cohesion did not come naturally among these elite sub-groups. At the dawn of democracy, there was a clear split between those with historical allegiance to the apartheid National Party, and those aligned with more liberal (but not revolutionary) white opposition parties. Over subsequent decades, these two factions largely merged—and were joined by smaller, independent (non-ANC) parties, whose allegiance was generally not ‘white’, and who historically had been very active in the struggle against apartheid.

have controlled the province. In these contested elections, non-elite swing voters (in the ‘middle’, ‘vulnerable’ and ‘transient poor’ classes) became politically central. Indeed, contestation among rival political parties for the allegiance of this demographic and economic middle has been heated.

In sum, consistent with the second causal mechanism, in the Western Cape, how a party governed while in power—whether it was perceived to use public resources well, or for more narrowly personal and political purposes—mattered for its future electoral prospects.

In the Eastern Cape, by contrast, the ANC dominated electorally. In 1994 it won 84 per cent of the vote in the province; this percentage declined subsequently, but as of 2015 had not fallen below 70 per cent. The electoral dominance of the ANC can be explained in part by the interaction between the province’s ethnic homogeneity and its distinctive historical legacy. A disproportionate number of the leaders of the struggle for liberation from apartheid—including Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Thabo Mbeki, Winnie Madikizela Mandela, Chris Hani and Walter Sisulu—were Xhosa-speaking sons and daughters of the province. This proud history translated into strong electoral loyalty to the ANC on the part of the numerically preponderant Xhosa-speaking voters.

To be sure, demand-side pressures are not the only determinants of a political party’s commitment to provide decent services. Even if middle class voices are weak, and elections uncompetitive, a commitment to better services might nonetheless derive from solidarity between a political party and its non-elite supporters. Further, it is plausible that electoral dominance could provide a ruling political party with the authority and long time horizon supportive of better service provision.<sup>11</sup> However, for reasons which will become apparent in the next subsection, this is not what happened in the Eastern Cape.

### 7.3.2 *Politics, Institutional Inheritances, and the Supply of Services*

We turn now to the two ‘supply-side’ causal mechanisms through which politics and institutions influence bureaucratic behaviour: the role of inherited institutional legacies; and patterns of intra-elite contestation within a governing political party.

As Keefer and Khemani (2005) explore, in choosing how to seek the allegiance of non-elites, political leaders confront a fundamental choice. One option is ‘programmatic’—leaders might try to win legitimacy by promising

<sup>11</sup> Here, again, Kelsall and vom Hau’s (2017) categories are useful. They distinguish between unipolar (hierarchically organized) and multipolar configurations of political power, and argue that a combination of unipolarity and a broad social foundation potentially can provide a strong platform for service provision. Khan (2010) makes a similar argument.

a specific programme of public action, and then utilize the public bureaucracy to deliver on these promises. Alternatively, they could seek to win support through personalized patronage and clientelistic vertical networks that link elite and 'intermediate class'<sup>12</sup> power-brokers with local communities. A key determinant of how political leaders choose between these two mechanisms is whether their promises to provide broad-based services (rather than targeted patronage) are perceived to be credible by voters. This is where inherited institutional legacies come into play.

The Western Cape inherited a bureaucracy which could straightforwardly respond to the relatively strong effective demand of citizens for services. During the apartheid era, alongside the white political and bureaucratic structures, the apartheid government had established a parallel 'parliament' and bureaucracy, the (coloured) House of Representatives (HoR). The white civil service and the HoR bureaucracy together were responsible for the provision of services (including education services) to the large majority of the Western Cape population.<sup>13</sup> As numerous studies of organizational culture have shown,<sup>14</sup> both South Africa's white public service and the HoR bureaucracy were steeped in traditional public administration, albeit with an apartheid bent. This culture has been described as bureaucratic, hierarchical and unresponsive, aimed more at controlling rather than developing the citizens of the country—but it generally operated on impersonal and hierarchical (that is, 'Weberian') lines. This inherited legacy of a relatively capable bureaucracy meant that voters were likely to perceive politicians' promises to provide public services as credible, adding to the impetus for political competition to be oriented around competing programmatic platforms, rather than patronage.

In the Eastern Cape, by contrast, the so-called 'Bantustans' comprised the crucial institutional legacy from the apartheid era. Two-thirds of the Eastern Cape's total 2015 population of 6.9 million people reside in areas which formerly had been part of either the Transkei or Ciskei Bantustans. Both the Transkei and Ciskei had nominally been independent (recognized as such only by the apartheid South African government). Both had large-scale bureaucratic apparatuses which were moulded together to comprise the major<sup>15</sup> part of the post-apartheid provincial bureaucracy.

<sup>12</sup> The term is used in this way in Khan and Jomo's (2000) analysis of rent networks in South Asia.

<sup>13</sup> Africans living in urban townships were under the control of the Department of Education and Training (DET). In the Western Cape, Africans were a minority and the number of DeT schools in the province were relatively small. There were also no Bantustans in the province. This meant that the province had to deal with only a modestly sized 'deadweight' of the most dysfunctional, control-oriented part of the apartheid state (Fiske and Ladd, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> McLennan and Fitzgerald (1992); Schwella (2000).

<sup>15</sup> Along with the two Bantustan bureaucracies, the third part of the Eastern Cape bureaucracy comprised some portions of the apartheid era Cape provincial bureaucracy—though the head

The two Bantustans had been organized along personalized, patronage lines.<sup>16</sup> These patronage patterns carried forward into the workings of the Eastern Cape province via two distinct mechanisms. As per Keefer and Khemani (2005), one mechanism worked through the credibility of political promises: weakness of the bureaucracy at the outset of the democratic era meant that, even under the best of circumstances, persuading citizens that promises to provide decent services would be credible would be an uphill challenge. But the circumstances prevailing in the province were especially unpropitious. This brings us to the second supply-side influence on bureaucratic behaviour—the role of intra-elite contestation within a governing political party.

The propensity for patronage in the Eastern Cape was compounded by the way in which Bantustan political elites were incorporated politically. In the wake of the dissolution of the Transkei and Ciskei Bantustans, a large majority of their political and bureaucratic elites (and also many ordinary citizens) joined the ANC—not out of conviction, but as members of convenience. Further, the (non-Bantustan) Eastern Cape ANC was itself hardly an ideologically unified party. In its early years, the ANC (both within the Eastern Cape and nationally) reflected the aspirations of a mission-educated aspirant African middle class which increasingly was being constrained by racially discriminatory policies.<sup>17</sup> In the decades prior to democracy, parts of the party had become increasingly militant; both Govan Mbeki (Thabo Mbeki's father) and Chris Hani were stalwarts of the South African Communist Party. The result was that the Eastern Cape ANC was less a disciplined, programmatically oriented political organization than an overall umbrella beneath which inter-elite contestation was endemic. This continuing contestation afforded the ANC's provincial leadership neither the authority nor the longer-term time horizon needed to translate electoral dominance into a commitment to better service provision.<sup>18</sup>

In sum, the Eastern Cape was especially poorly positioned vis-à-vis each of the causal mechanisms linking context to bureaucratic operation and performance. The middle class was weak. Elections were uncompetitive. The bureaucratic legacy was dismal. The wide diversity of ideologies and motivations resulted in ongoing internecine struggles within the Eastern Cape ANC's leadership. Patronage, not programmatic commitments to improve services, became the default mechanism for maintaining the political allegiance of non-elites.

office, and senior staff, had been located in Cape Town, and most transferred into the Western Cape's bureaucracy.

<sup>16</sup> Streek and Wickstead (1981).      <sup>17</sup> Lodge (2014); Southall (2004).

<sup>18</sup> In the terminology of Kelsall and vom Hau, the Eastern Cape ANC was a multipolar rather than unipolar political party.



### 7.4 From Context to Action

What does the evidence that ‘context matters’ imply as to the prospects for improving bureaucratic performance?<sup>19</sup> Does better bureaucratic performance translate into better service provision? Insofar as the bureaucracy is weak, what are the prospects for improvement? This final section explores these questions.

#### 7.4.1 *Cumulative Causation—Virtuous and Vicious Circles*

A central goal of this chapter is to clarify and illustrate how political drivers shape and constrain the performance of bureaucracies. The interactions between the political and bureaucratic realms turn out to be more complex, with more potential for two-way causality, than is implied by simple nostrums along the lines of, say, ‘politics is trumps’.

Chapter 1 identified four distinct ‘ideal types’ of political settlement, each cascading down through multiple institutional, political, and organizational levels. While specific contexts often can be hybrid combinations of the four patterns, in practice the Western Cape and Eastern Cape turned out to be paradigmatic provincial-level examples of two distinct types:

- The Western Cape emerged as a classic example of a ‘competitive with rule-of-law’ provincial-level political settlement; as section 7.3 has detailed, all of the exogenous variables mutually reinforced one another in a way which fostered a high-level equilibrium of a capable bureaucracy.
- The Eastern Cape, by contrast, was a paradigmatic example of a personalized competitive (or competitive clientelist) settlement; the exogenous variables reinforced each other in the opposite direction from the Western Cape, locking in a low-level equilibrium.

The two case study provinces provide an opportunity for considering the dynamics of each of the two polar opposite ‘ideal types’. Consider, first, an Eastern Cape type starting point of an initially weak socio-economic, political and institutional setting. As the Eastern Cape case suggests, the result of this mutually reinforcing pattern is a low-level equilibrium trap. From that starting point, whether a virtuous spiral of improvement takes hold—or whether a

<sup>19</sup> For an in-depth analysis of how context shapes development policymaking and practice, including vis-à-vis public bureaucracies, see Levy (2014).

vicious circle of a continuing low-level equilibrium of patronage and poor service provision persists—follows directly from actions which emanate from the political realm.

A vicious circle will persist if an initially weak political context remains unsupportive (with, say, continuing inter-elite competition and continuing neglect of the development challenges confronting non-elites). In such circumstances, the incentives transmitted from the political to the bureaucratic levels reinforce factionalized loyalty within multiple patronage networks, with little incentive to improve the provision of public services.

In a context such as this, technocratic tinkering to improve bureaucratic performance is unlikely to gain traction. Rather, a necessary condition for change would be a transformation of the political context in a way which altered the incentives emanating from the political level in directions more supportive of development. Thus, a virtuous spiral might become possible if, say, the governing party were to become more developmental (perhaps as a result of internal changes within the party, perhaps the result of electoral success on the part of a newly emergent opposition). But even then, the continuing 'stickiness' of the other exogenous variables (weak effective demand; weak institutions), the journey of public sector transformation would be long and difficult, and risks of reversal would abound. In such contexts, policymakers and others might usefully focus on trying to improve service within 'islands of effectiveness' which are not dependent on broader socio-economic, political, and institutional change.

Now consider an alternative, Western Cape type, starting point where both the demand side and supply sides support the provision of decent services. This high-level equilibrium provides something of a buttress against a politically driven downward spiral: If the political leadership remains pro-developmental (with or without an actual alternation of the governing party) then good quality service provision can be sustained.

If, notwithstanding the initially strong capabilities, a new set of elites won power and sought to pursue private interests, they would be constrained (at least for a while) by the prevailing system—both the strong 'Weberian' culture of adherence to impersonal rules, and by the fact that within a few years they would need to defend their record in what almost certainly would be a highly contested election. Eventually, sustained predatory pressures from political leaders could breach the buttresses. However, the conflicts between predatory politics and a rule-governed bureaucracy would, at a minimum, provide time and opportunity for the political realm to self-correct, before a downward spiral could take hold.

Note that the robustness of the above two equilibria is derived from the mutually reinforcing configuration of the 'exogenous' contextual variables.

Had the research been undertaken in other provinces, it is likely that in at least some of them, the exogenous variables would have aligned in a more mixed way:

- Relative to the Eastern Cape, some provinces potentially could have a stronger institutional inheritance, or a more internally coherent provincial wing of the ANC. In such settings, the challenge of turnaround might not be as daunting as it is for the Eastern Cape.
- Relative to the Western Cape, some provinces (Gauteng is an obvious example, at least until 2016) might have had a similarly strong institutional inheritance and middle class, but less closely contested elections.

In these more mixed cases, the quality of public bureaucracy would be more of a knife edge. In the former group, were a developmentally oriented political leadership to win control of the province, the path to improving bureaucratic performance could be easier than in the Eastern Cape. Conversely, in provinces which were partial approximations of the Western Cape, because the ‘guardrails’ are relatively weaker, were control to pass into the hands of a predatory leadership, the bureaucracy could more readily slide into a downward spiral.

To make the point differently, our analysis is not intended to imply that there is no scope for provincial-level leaders (both political and technocratic) to make a difference, for good or ill. But it does imply that the broader socio-economic, political, and institutional context has a powerful influence on how much change is feasible.

### *7.4.2 Improving Educational Outcomes—Bureaucracy and its Limits*

While context may shape bureaucratic quality, how well bureaucracy functions is not the only governance determinant of educational outcomes. To be sure, a well-functioning hierarchy can undertake efficiently many of the logistical tasks (e.g. teacher post provisioning; payroll; infrastructure provisioning and maintenance; textbook and supplies management) associated with a large public educational system. Further, a well-functioning bureaucracy potentially might function as a sort of transmission belt, communicating emerging evidence as to pedagogical approaches which improve educational outcomes throughout the school system.

Yet for all of these potential benefits, the research reported in Chapters 4–6 also underscores some of the limits of hierarchical approaches to improving outcomes. One limitation is political. As the study of the Eastern Cape bureaucracy in Chapter 5 underscores (as does, to a lesser degree, the Chapter 3 analysis of efforts to introduce performance management nationally), the

explanations for weak bureaucratic performance often are to be found, not in shortfalls of management, but in constraints which derive from the ways in which political actors interact with one another. In such settings, insofar as these constraints are decisive, it follows that efforts to improve educational outcomes might more usefully focus on approaches whose efficacy is not dependent on unachievable gains in bureaucratic functioning. To make the point differently, in such settings, horizontal governance potentially might function as a potential institutional *substitute*, providing a platform for school-level ‘islands of effectiveness’ to take on, reasonably effectively, some tasks which in bureaucratically better-endowed settings might be better done hierarchically.

Now consider the contrasting Western Cape setting where bureaucracy functions relatively well. In such settings, are hierarchical approaches to improving educational outcomes sufficient—or might there be case for *complementing* them with more horizontal initiatives? Both theory and evidence suggest that there may indeed be a case for the latter. Theoretically, as Chapter 1 details, the case revolves around the ways in which locating authority close to the service provision front-line can create opportunities for customization, for improving local-level motivation, and for utilizing local-level information.<sup>20</sup> Empirically, the evidence from Chapters 4 and 6 on the performance of the Western Cape bureaucracy underscores the limits of hierarchy.

Consider first evidence on the contrasting educational performance of the Western Cape and Kenya. As Table 7.2 showed, even though Kenya has a per capita income less than a quarter that of South Africa’s, and thus substantially fewer resources per pupil (with not all of these differences captured in the explanatory variables), its education system systematically outperforms the Western Cape. Of course, outcomes depend on multiple influences—so focusing only on outcome measures as a basis for assessing performance is misleading.

Chapter 6 of this volume reports the results of a careful econometric effort to control for these other influences. The econometric strategy was to isolate a ‘Western Cape effect’ on educational outcomes (in the form of the coefficient of a dummy variable for the province) once other influences were controlled for—home background, socio-economic status, teacher qualifications, other teacher/classroom characteristics, plus a subset of governance indicators.<sup>21</sup> With these controls, the coefficient of the Western Cape

<sup>20</sup> Key contributions to literature on the value added of front-line autonomy include Sah and Stiglitz (1986), Aghion and Tirole (1997), Wilson (1989), Lipsky (2010) and Scott (1998).

<sup>21</sup> Each of these are composite measures, built on very detailed student, parent and school-specific information collected in the SACMEQ survey. Chapter 6 provides additional information on each of the underlying data points, including average scores for each in each of the locales they analyse.

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dummy variable can be interpreted as being, in significant part an (unmeasured) ‘governance effect’.

Table 7.6 reports on a few of the results from the Chapter 6 effort. As the table shows, relative to Kenya<sup>22</sup> the Western Cape effect is negative; even after controlling for a wide variety of influences. Given the evident robustness of the Western Cape bureaucracy, and the well-known unevenness of Kenya’s public management systems, it is highly unlikely that the performance gap can be explained by superior hierarchical management on the part of Kenya. Rather, the results could be interpreted as pointing to the possibility that it is in the ‘softer’ side of the governance of education—perhaps motivation on the part of teachers and other stakeholders, perhaps the patterns of participatory, horizontal governance—that Kenya has an advantage. The comparison with Kenya is explored further in Chapter 10.

The econometric comparison of the Western and Eastern Cape offers an intriguing added pointer as to the relevance of the softer side of governance, in this case as a partial substitute for weak bureaucratic capability. Unsurprisingly, as Table 7.6 shows, relative to the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape effect is significant and positive. However, the inclusion of ‘parental contribution to school building and teaching materials’ as an explanatory variable increases substantially the absolute value of the effect. Why? In the SACMEQ data series, 57 per cent of Eastern Cape parents (but only 13 per cent of Western Cape parents) assist with school building—and 65 per cent (but only

**Table 7.6.** Grade 6 Mathematics SACMEQ Scores—The ‘Western Cape’ Effect (coefficient on Western Cape dummy variable)

<i>Comparison country/region:</i>	1	2
Kenya (Nairobi and Central)	-0.373**	-0.434**
Eastern Cape	+0.488***	+0.890***
<i>controls:</i>		
Home background	X	X
Socio-economic status	X	X
Teacher test scores	X	X
Teacher/classroom characteristics	X	X
Parents contribute to school building and teaching materials		X

\*\*\*significance at 1% level \*\*significance at 5% level \*significance at 10% level.

Source: Wills, Shepherd and Kotze (chapter 6)

<sup>22</sup> The comparison is specifically with results for Kenya’s Nairobi and Central provinces. As Wills et al. detail in Chapter 6, these provinces are reasonably similar in their SES demographic to the Western Cape. The statistical procedures break down when SES differences across the populations are too large.

18 per cent in the Western Cape) with school maintenance.<sup>23</sup> Plausibly, parental participation serves as a partial institutional substitute for weaknesses in the Eastern Cape bureaucracy—with the true magnitude of the costs imposed on Eastern Cape children by weaknesses in the ECDoE only evident once the parental role is accounted for.

In sum, the econometric results suggest that bureaucracy need not be destiny—that there are other dimensions of the governance of education systems which can, as in the Eastern Cape, be partial institutional substitutes for relatively weak hierarchical bureaucratic capability, or (as seems likely in Kenya) can be complements, adding to the overall efficacy of the system. Chapters 8–10 explore the potential role of more horizontal, participatory mechanisms via an in-depth look at school-level governance dynamics, and their relation to educational outcomes.

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<sup>23</sup> As Chapter 6 details, in Kenya, 55 per cent of parents assist with school buildings, and 42 per cent with maintenance.

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# 10

## 'All for Education'—Meeting the Governance Challenge

*Brian Levy*

### 10.1 Introduction

Over the past quarter century, access to schooling has expanded rapidly the world over, but gains in literacy and numeracy have proven harder to come by. Transforming schooling into learning for all is a central challenge of our time. This book addresses the challenge through a focus on the governance of public education in South Africa, a country whose legacy of discrimination, inequality and poverty gives special urgency to the task of improving educational outcomes. Chapters 2–9 set out the empirical findings as to the relationship between governance and educational outcomes. This chapter explores some potential policy implications.

In any educational system, the crucial learning relationship is that between the learner and teacher—so research as to what pedagogical approaches are effective has, for good reason, been a central focus of efforts to strengthen educational outcomes. Attention to pedagogy has been of special salience in South Africa. As Chapter 2 of the book detailed, the post-apartheid transformation of South Africa's education system was multi-dimensional. Alongside far-reaching fiscal, equity and institutional changes, the country also had to re-orient teaching away from inherited master-servant patterns, put in place a wholly new post-apartheid curriculum and, more broadly, learn about the kinds of non-elitist pedagogical approaches which can achieve rapid gains for an historically oppressed population.

But the fact that pedagogy matters does not diminish the salience of governance. For one thing, though much has been learned about effective pedagogy, the gains have not yet spread broadly. Getting beyond pilot initiatives and working at scale by disseminating knowledge as to what works, and

supporting teachers seeking to adopt new practices, is a central function of education bureaucracies—and thus how they are governed. More broadly, governance arrangements matter crucially for outcomes because they structure the incentives, constraints, rewards and sanctions of a system's participants—and thereby shape the efficiency and effectiveness with which resources are used to achieve the intended results.

All too often, governance challenges have been conceived in narrowly technocratic terms—with a presumption that, given enough 'capacity' and 'political will', shortfalls in governance can be addressed straightforwardly. However, as a classic report on *Making Services Work for Poor People* underscored:

Too frequently those seeking improvement have focused only on internal organizational reforms—focusing on management of the frontline workers. If organizational failures are the result of deeper weaknesses in institutional arrangements... direct attacks on the proximate determinants (more money, better training, more internal information) will fail.<sup>1</sup>

Building on this critique, in recent years scholars and practitioners have explored in depth the relationships between context, governance and development outcomes. The nostrum that 'context matters' in shaping the efficacy of specific governance arrangements has become commonplace. The frontier challenge, explored in this book, is to probe *how* context matters—how the preferred ('good fit') approach to improving outcomes varies according to specific political and institutional contexts.

This book has explored the link between context and good fit in relation to a specific governance-related question: what should be the balance between hierarchical and horizontal institutional arrangements for the public provision of basic education? As Chapter 1 reviews, some scholars and practitioners argue that education should be tightly managed hierarchically—with strong, top-down control of recruitment, promotion, curriculum and the content of classroom-level instruction. But others argue for more horizontal approaches which delegate significant resources and responsibility to internal and community stakeholders at the school level, thereby allowing for the development of appropriate context-specific solutions. Following the logic laid out above, an obvious response to the hierarchical-horizontal debate is to argue that the appropriate balance between hierarchical and horizontal governance depends crucially on context. But how?

South Africa's far-reaching reforms of the education sector, laid out in the 1996 South African Schools Act (SASA), provide an ideal 'natural experiment' for exploring the interplay between context, hierarchical and horizontal

<sup>1</sup> World Bank (2004: 58).

governance. SASA replaced the pre-existing, fragmented and racially-ordered institutional arrangements with a unified, multi-tiered system:

- The national-level was assigned responsibility for policymaking, for resourcing the system, and for setting the overall regulatory framework.
- The provincial-level was assigned responsibility for implementation—for spending the budgetary resources made available from the centre, and employing the teachers, administrators and other personnel who comprised the vast majority of employees in the system.
- Substantial school-level responsibilities (including important roles in the recruitment of the school principal and senior teachers) were assigned to school-governing bodies (SGBs) in which parents were required to be in the majority.

Chapters 2–7 of the book explored how politics and institutions influence the structure and performance of South Africa’s education bureaucracies at both the national level (Chapters 2 and 3), and the provincial level (Chapters 4–7). Chapters 8 and 9 detailed the results of school-level case studies conducted in South Africa’s Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces.

The current chapter explores the implications of the findings for action, situating the analysis within the broader context of the education system as a whole. Section 10.2 lays out the policy possibilities, limitations, synergies and constraints of hierarchical and horizontal governance in the South African context. Section 10.3 synthesizes the school-level case study findings, highlighting the links between hyper-local governance dynamics and performance. Section 10.4 explores why it has been so difficult, in South Africa and elsewhere, to address the challenges of governance (and other) reforms in the education sector—and how these challenges might be addressed more effectively.

### 10.2 Hierarchical and Horizontal Governance Revisited

Theory tells us that both hierarchical and horizontal governance have the potential to support good educational outcomes, in distinctive ways. A well-functioning hierarchy can undertake efficiently many of the logistical tasks (e.g. teacher post provisioning, payroll, infrastructure provisioning and maintenance, textbook and supplies management) associated with a large public educational system. Crucially for the South African context, a well-functioning bureaucracy potentially can also function as a transmission belt, investing in learning about pedagogical approaches which improve educational outcomes, and communicating the results throughout the school system.

Horizontal governance also has the potential to add value—both as a complement and as a substitute for hierarchy. As Chapter 1 explored in depth, in sectors such as education where service provision is diffused geographically, delegation of authority to local levels potentially can improve performance. Where bureaucracy is strong, horizontal governance potentially can function as a complement:

- helping to customize provision in ways which are responsive to the local context;
- improving motivation—with a 'zone of autonomy' at the service provision front line providing the opportunity for internal leaders to motivate their teams effectively, including by fostering an environment of continuing learning on the part of staff as well as students;
- creating scope for the utilization of local-level information of a kind to which higher-level hierarchical authorities lack access—and thereby enhancing processes for the selection of good quality staff and leaders, and the efficacy of efforts to hold staff and leaders accountable for their performance.

Where bureaucracy is weak, horizontal governance potentially can be useful in a different way. Along with the specifically local functions highlighted above, local participation could function as a potential institutional substitute—providing support for some of the logistical, managerial and oversight functions which in other contexts might be done hierarchically.

Figure 10.1 suggests one way of framing how hierarchical and horizontal governance might interact in different contexts. The horizontal axis distinguishes between settings where hierarchical governance is relatively strong, and settings where it is weak. The vertical axis distinguishes between settings where school governing body and community engagement is developmental, and those where it is weak or predatory. The barrier along the horizontal axis signals that (for reasons explored in detail in Chapter 7 and discussed further

Horizontal governance: Quality of SGB and community engagement	Developmental	B ↑ ⋮	D ↑ ⋮
	Weak or predatory	A ⋮	C ⋮
		Weak →	Strong
Bureaucratic quality			

**Figure 10.1.** Governance options for improving school outcomes

Source: author

below) the potential to strengthen hierarchy is limited in contexts where politics and institutions are personalized, patronage-oriented and fragmented.

Three distinctive ways of leveraging governance to improve educational outcomes in different contexts are suggested by the figure:

- In settings where political and institutional constraints are such that weaknesses in bureaucratic capability are unlikely to be remediable—endeavouring to improve outcomes by moving from quadrant A to quadrant B, with participatory horizontal governance functioning as a potential institutional substitute.
- In settings illustrated by quadrant C where hierarchical governance is relatively strong, horizontal governance is weak, and educational outcomes are disappointing—endeavouring to identify targeted ways of leveraging and building on the pre-existing strengths of the hierarchy to improve outcomes (i.e. improving outcomes while remaining within quadrant C).
- (Also with quadrant C as a starting point): complementing hierarchical initiatives with efforts to strengthen horizontal governance—that is, trying to move from quadrant C to quadrant D.

The sections which follow elaborate on these options, drawing on both the results of the Western Cape and Eastern Cape case studies, and the broader comparative literature.

### 10.2.1 *Hierarchies in Practice*

The comparison of South Africa's Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces illustrates vividly how divergent socio-economic, political and institutional contexts shape the performance of education bureaucracies. Table 10.1 summarizes some of the contextual differences between the two provinces. Chapter 7 provides more detailed information, and analyses in depth the causal mechanisms through which these distinctive contexts affect the behaviour of their bureaucracies.

The Eastern Cape provided a strikingly unpropitious political and institutional context for the consolidation of a results-oriented bureaucracy. The province inherited from the apartheid era a fragmented, patronage-oriented bureaucracy. Its weak middle class, and the electoral dominance of one political party, translated into weak demand-side pressure for better services. Fragmentation among elites within the dominant party fuelled further the predisposition to seek influence via patronage. The result was that, as Chapter 5 details, the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) has been bedevilled by divergent and competing regional interests, organizational

**Table 10.1.** Two Divergent Contexts

	1. Socio-economic	2. Political	3. Inherited institutions
<b>Western Cape</b>	Diverse social composition—both ethnically & by economic class	- elites dispersed across multiple political parties with two broad groupings - competitive elections	Inheritance of ‘impersonal’ bureaucracy
<b>Eastern Cape</b>	Homogenous social composition—disproportionately poor & Xhosa-speaking	- ANC electorally dominant; - deep intra-party fragmentation	Inheritance of patronage bantustan bureaucracies

*Source:* chapter 7

cultures, and patronage ties which consistently defied centralized control. It has experienced repeated leadership turnover and a general flouting of centralized authority. Obstacles to enforcing management control and sustaining leadership continuity have contributed to chronic weaknesses in both financial and personnel management. This low-level equilibrium proved resistant to change, even when the provincial department of education was taken under administration by central government.

The question naturally arises as to whether, as per Figure 10.1, horizontal governance might serve in an Eastern Cape-type setting as at least a partial institutional substitute for hierarchical weakness. On this score, the research findings are somewhat encouraging. The comparative econometric analysis laid out in Chapter 6 found that including ‘parental contribution to school construction and maintenance’ as an explanatory variable had a positive and statistically significant effect on educational outcomes. The school-level case study analyses in Chapter 9 (on which more below) detailed the causal mechanisms through which participatory governance can (but need not) have a positive influence on school performance.

By contrast to the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape’s socio-economic, political and institutional context provided a supportive platform for relatively strong bureaucratic capability, oriented towards public service provision. As Chapter 5 details, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) does well the core tasks of a bureaucracy: managing resources; assigning personnel to where they are most needed; monitoring and managing on the basis of performance. In turn, as Chapter 6 explored econometrically, these bureaucratic strengths translated into gains in educational outcomes relative to other South African provinces, even once other determinants of outcomes are controlled for. But strikingly, the econometric analysis in Chapter 6 also showed that, for all of the strengths of its bureaucracy, when compared with some other African educational systems (notably Kenya), the outcomes achieved by

the Western Cape were mediocre (paralleling quadrant C in Figure 10.1). Why this might be the case is considered further in section 10.4.

The above is not intended to imply that there is no scope for provincial-level leaders (both political and technocratic) to improve education bureaucracies. But it does imply that these individual efforts can be supported by (or confounded by) context. Note, though, that the Table 10.1 divergence in contexts between the two provinces is extreme. In such contexts, the status quo will be more tightly locked in (again, for good or ill), so change will be more constrained, and more incremental. Had the research been undertaken in other provinces, it is likely that in at least some of them, the exogenous variables would have aligned in a more mixed way. In these more mixed cases, the quality of public bureaucracy would be more of a knife edge, with scope for more rapid improvement (or more rapid decline).

### 10.2.2 *Horizontal Governance in Practice*

Plausibly, as Figure 10.1 suggests, horizontal governance can offset some of hierarchical governance's limitations: in settings such as the Eastern Cape, where the capabilities of hierarchies are weak, but where the broader context renders bureaucratic improvement infeasible, it might serve as an institutional substitute. In all settings, it could serve as an institutional complement, taking on specific hyper-local functions which fall below the radar even of relatively well-performing bureaucracies. But does this happen in practice?

SASA's assignment of substantial school-level responsibilities (including the recruitment of the school principal and senior teachers) to school governing bodies (SGBs) in which parents are required to be in the majority provides an excellent opportunity for exploring empirically the extent to which horizontal governance can indeed realize its potential as complement and/or partial substitute for hierarchies. But paradoxically SASA's seeming empowerment of the school-level cannot be taken as a signal that South Africa's education system has embraced horizontal governance.

As discussed further in the final section of this chapter, momentum for the empowerment of SGBs in SASA came via two sources: via the interests of affluent parents who had been beneficiaries of apartheid-era public schooling; and via those anti-apartheid activists who had embraced a participatory vision of democracy. While the latter influence weakened rapidly, the concerns of white South Africans that quality be maintained in the public<sup>2</sup> schools which historically had served their children shaped both the design

<sup>2</sup> In South Africa, public education dominates, both historically and to the present day; as of 2015, about 95 per cent of school-going children were enrolled in the public system.

and implementation of policy towards SGBs. The delegation of substantial authority to the school level, including the right to top-up public funds with self-financing by the parent body, was a way of assuaging these concerns.

However, while affluent families can relatively straightforwardly take on the enhanced school-level responsibilities assigned by SASA, the challenge is more formidable for poor families. Whether and how the rhetorical embrace of participation might translate into genuine empowerment of parents and communities, beyond the already-empowered elites, was a central question of the school-level case study research reported in Chapters 8 and 9 and is explored comparatively in section 10.3 below. To set the stage for that analysis, it is helpful first to lay out some of the relevant issues and evidence raised from the global comparative literature.

Research worldwide suggests that strengthened horizontal governance can (but need not) improve educational outcomes. Bruns, Filmer, and Patrinos (2011) offer rich detail on dozens of carefully evaluated horizontal reforms, including reforms to improve school-based management, to enhance information transparency, and to make teachers more accountable for performance. They find considerable variations in impact; some interventions turn out to make a significant positive difference, others have been ineffective. Mansuri and Rao's (2013) multi-sector and multi-country review of whether participation works finds a similarly variable set of effects. What accounts for these variations?

One possible explanation for the variation is that the potential for horizontal governance is inherently limited in settings where parents are poor and uneducated, and thus lack the requisite basic skills (let alone knowledge of pedagogy) to participate effectively in school governance. This explanation is not consistent with the evidence of positive impact (including in poor communities with low levels of education) cited above. The school-level case studies summarized below add to the evidence by detailing the causal mechanisms through which horizontal governance can have a positive impact, even when parents themselves lack education.

A second possible explanation is that the cause of variations in performance lies not so much in governance as in divergent pedagogical and managerial practices. A pessimistic view would be that the technical constraints are binding, so there are no gains to be had from strengthening horizontal governance. A more optimistic view is that even in such circumstances enhanced participation can transform interactions at the school-level—strengthening accountability and commitment to results, and more broadly fostering mutual solidarity and a learning-oriented culture. The school-level findings in section 10.3 shed empirical light on this question.



A third common explanation for variation across locales is that the efficacy of horizontal governance depends on power—with parents in poor communities generally disempowered relative to teachers, school leadership and the organizational structures (bureaucracies and unions) of education. Thus, so the concern goes, even if horizontal governance can be shown to add value, efforts to strengthen it will be blocked by more powerful stakeholders with a vested interest in the status quo. Analytically, as Levy (2014) explores, this issue concerns the strength of developmentally oriented stakeholders relative to predatory actors seeking to capture school-level resources for private or political purposes—and whether these threat/trumping dynamics are rigid, or subject to change. Again, the school-level case studies in section 10.3 provide empirical insight.

### 10.3 Governance at the School Level

The school-level governance research detailed in Chapters 8 and 9 explored the causal mechanisms through which educational outcomes were shaped by interactions between school leadership and other stakeholders inside and outside the school. This section provides a comparative synthesis of some key findings.

The research focused on eight schools—four in the Western Cape and four in the Eastern Cape. The case studies adopted a process tracing methodology, which enabled them to drill into the details of the causal mechanisms through which horizontal governance influenced school-level outcomes.<sup>3</sup> To control for the influence of socio-economic conditions on performance, the initial intention was to target matched pairs of successful and less successful schools within the same community. While the eight schools indeed comprised four sets of geographically contiguous matched pairs, the patterns of success and weakness turned out to be more complex than initially had been expected. All eight schools had gone through a change in principal over the relevant period, making for the three distinct governance ‘episodes’ illustrated in Figure 10.2: an initial period; a transitional period, and associated process of selection of a new principal; and a later period. As detailed later, within-school variations in performance over time turned out to be strongly associated with changes in principal.

Table 10.2 summarizes the main findings from the case studies vis-à-vis the influence of hierarchical and horizontal governance in each school. The

<sup>3</sup> As detailed in Chapter 8, in the Western Cape, outcomes were measured by trends in school-level systemic tests conducted by the WCED. In the Eastern Cape no parallel test results were available; trends in enrolment were used as a proxy.

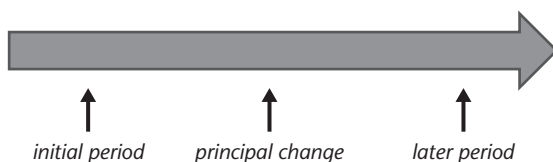


Figure 10.2. All case study schools experienced a change in leadership

Table 10.2. Governance and Performance in the Case Study Schools

	Eastern Cape	Western Cape
<b>I: INFLUENCE OF HIERARCHICAL GOVERNANCE</b>		
<i>Role of provincial bureaucracy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Protects dysfunctional status quo in two schools;</li> <li>- Offers modest support for school principals seeking turnaround in later period in two schools.</li> </ul>	WCED buttresses authority of charismatic principals in initial period in two schools, but performance declined when the principals left.
<i>Role of school-level leaders</i>	<p>How authority is exercised by school leaders consistently has a strong influence on governance and performance in all periods in all schools</p> <p>Highly respected principal drives relatively strong performance in early initial period in one school.</p>	Charismatic principals drive strong performance-orientation in initial period in two schools
<b>II: INFLUENCE OF HORIZONTAL GOVERNANCE</b>		
<i>Positive influence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sustained performance-oriented multi-stakeholder governance in one school</li> <li>- Stakeholder initiated turnaround in two schools</li> </ul>	- Stakeholder supported turnaround in one school
<i>Negative influence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ongoing capture in one school</li> <li>- Capture during earlier period in two schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ongoing capture in one school</li> <li>- Capture in latter period in one school</li> <li>- Conflictual principal succession disrupts performance in one school</li> </ul>

table distinguishes between two facets of hierarchical governance: hierarchical influence exerted by the relevant provincial department, and leadership by the school principal. The school-level findings as to the role of provincial bureaucracies are consistent with the provincial-level evidence of Chapters 4–7. In none of the Eastern Cape case studies was there any evidence that the ECDoE offered more than very modest help to foster a performance orientation at the school-level. The Western Cape’s WCED, by contrast, played a more pro-active role—but there are some paradoxical findings, which are best considered jointly in the discussion below of the role of the school principal.

As the table also summarizes, there were substantial variations across schools—and within schools over time—in the influence of horizontal governance. In some schools, for some periods of time, its influence was positive. In others, a variety of school-level stakeholders were complicit in the capture of school-level resources for more narrowly personalized purposes. The efficacy

of horizontal governance turned out to be strongly associated with the approach to leadership of the school principal, with some striking interactions between the (Figure 10.2) initial period and later period patterns.

The centrality of the school principal has been identified in global research on school-level governance as an important proximate determinant of school performance (Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi, 2010). The findings in the Chapter 8 and 9 case studies are consistent with this, but with a crucial addition. As they underscore, the principal does not function in isolation, but is embedded in a dense network of horizontal interactions with teachers, with the school governing body (SGB), with parents, and with the community more broadly. Over time, these relationships—and how the principal nurtures them (or fails to nurture them)—are key underlying determinants of school-level educational outcomes.

Table 10.3 applies the governance framework introduced in Chapter 1 and used throughout this volume to characterize some different ways in which school principals approach engagement with other stakeholders. The framework is organized around two dimensions of school-level governance arrangements. One dimension distinguishes between hierarchical and more horizontal, peer-to-peer modes of structuring authority—with the former organized around vertical relationships between ‘principals’ and ‘agents’, and the latter organized around negotiated understandings among multiple stakeholders. The second dimension distinguishes between impersonal and personalized governance arrangements—with the former built around rules which apply equally to all who have standing, and the latter structured around informal understanding among influential actors.

In practice, any specific governance arrangement is likely to be a hybrid combination of the resulting four cells, with the relative weight varying from school to school. A useful heuristic way of describing these hybrid patterns is to allocate 100 points across the four cells. Table 10.3 highlights three distinct patterns. Each builds on, but should not be interpreted as being identical to,

**Table 10.3.** Three Patterns of School-Level Governance

<i>A: Principal-centric governance</i>		
<b>Hierarchical</b>	70	
<b>Horizontal</b>	10	20
	<b>Personalized</b>	<b>Impersonal</b>
<i>B: Collaborative governance</i>		
<b>Hierarchical</b>	25	25
<b>Horizontal</b>	25	25
	<b>Personalized</b>	<b>Impersonal</b>
<i>C: Bottom-up governance</i>		
<b>Hierarchical</b>	0–50	5
<b>Horizontal</b>	40–90	5
	<b>Personalized</b>	<b>Impersonal</b>

school-specific patterns of interaction among stakeholders described in depth in the Chapter 8 and 9 case studies.

The first pattern, illustrated heuristically in Table 10.3 panel A and evident in three schools, comprises strong top-down leadership by a charismatic, committed results-oriented principal. As Chapter 8 details, in the two Western Cape schools this leadership was underpinned by support from a well-functioning bureaucracy. This leadership style yielded good results—but (for reasons explored below) only in the initial period.

In a second pattern, illustrated by Table 10.3 panel B, the school principal's approach to leadership is strongly collaborative. Among the case study schools, the clearest illustration of strong, participatory leadership was a school in the Eastern Cape. The institutional culture of the school, established by its founding principal, was one where all stakeholders—teachers, the SGB, the extended community—felt included. Even with the ECDoE, which was carefully kept at arm's length, relationships remained cordial. This pattern of collaborative governance was underpinned by impersonal rules, collectively developed, collectively owned, and largely self-imposed.

The third pattern, evident in the initial period in four of the eight schools, was one of weak/captured leadership. In two cases (one in each province) this dysfunctional leadership can be linked directly to the predatory preferences of a 'strong' principal, who inculcated a culture of self-seeking and inattention to learning throughout their schools. In the remaining two schools (both in the Eastern Cape) leadership was relatively weak; in one of the two there was a low-level equilibrium of capture with the principal, teachers, and the SGB working in cahoots with one another; in the other the stakeholders were mired in endemic conflict.

The way in which school principals engaged with other stakeholders in the initial period had a powerful impact on the interactions in subsequent periods—with principal succession comprising the critical juncture. In three of the eight case study schools, the initial period equilibrium proved to be robust over time:

- A high-level equilibrium of strong performance persisted throughout the period of study in the Eastern Cape school which had successfully inculcated a set of collaborative governance arrangements in the first period. (Indeed, this was the only one of the eight case study schools which consistently sustained relatively<sup>4</sup> strong performance throughout the

<sup>4</sup> Both the trend in numbers of students and area feedback (and visual observation during fieldwork) identify the school as a relatively strong performer locally. But given the vast disparities between average performance in the Eastern and Western Cape, there is no basis for extrapolating this relative success into absolutely strong performance in relation to schools in low-income areas in both provinces.

period of study.) The school's inclusive culture supported a smooth process of principal succession. The successor principal, an internal candidate from within the teaching staff, had been mentored by the initial principal, enjoyed the support of the SGB and, once appointed, continued along the path that had been established.

- A low-level equilibrium persisted in two schools (one in each province), with captured/weak SGBs selecting school principals who (in one case) actively supported the continuation of the dysfunctional equilibrium and (in the other) seemed powerless to reverse the dysfunctions, despite what seemed to be good intentions.

In the remaining five schools, the inter-temporal dynamics were less stable.

Three schools went from relatively strong to weak performance. Strikingly, all three were schools where initially strong performance was based on charismatic leadership by the principal—with the subsequent declines pointing to the limitations of this 'heroic' style of leadership. Though in the short term, the determined efforts of a strong principal can yield success, at some point the time comes for succession. If succession turns out badly (as happened in both of the Western Cape schools), or if the principal loses authority for some other reason (as happened in the Eastern Cape example), then this successful performance is likely to be reversed. (Chapter 8's detailed depiction for two Western Cape schools of how the institutional vacuum that became evident following the exit of a charismatic principal resulted in conflict and a collapse of school performance is especially salient.)

The remaining two case study schools (one in the Western Cape, and one in the Eastern Cape) offer vivid examples of performance turnaround—with (as per Table 10.3 panel C) the turnarounds underpinned by active multistakeholder engagement. In the Western Cape turnaround school, poor results in a first cycle of standardized tests, conducted in 2002 and 2004 shocked the school community. In response, and building on close relationships between the principal and the community, an intensive effort was made to improve outcomes, which subsequently rose significantly (although, it must be noted, not to the level of becoming a high performer). This school also was the only one of the four Western Cape case studies where principal transition successfully proceeded by the book.

The role of participatory governance is even more striking in the Eastern Cape example of turnaround. This school had long been characterized by neglectful and predatory leadership on the part of an often-absent principal. The number of pupils had fallen from close to 1,000 in the early 1990s to a low of 341 in 2011. After over a decade(!) of ongoing dysfunction, a group of parents and some SGB members met, and jointly reached the view that the principal needed to be replaced. At the group's urging, the SGB took their decision to the ECDoE district office. After failing to win support from the bureaucracy, the

parent community staged a protest, preventing the principal from accessing the school, and forcing the appointment of a replacement, with whom they worked closely to turn around the school. By 2015, four years after the intervention by parents, the number of pupils in the school had risen to 547, up by 70 per cent from the trough.

In sum, and crucially for policy purposes, the school-level case studies show that stakeholder dynamics are not pre-ordained by either the broader local context or by the strength of the education bureaucracy, but turn out to be contingent and cumulative—with individual agency by stakeholders playing a significant role. This raises the possibility that pro-active interventions potentially could tilt the balance of threat-trumping interactions in some fraction of schools away from predatory and towards more developmental actors, with a positive impact on educational outcomes. This possibility is explored further in section 10.4.

Before concluding the discussion of the school-level case studies, one final empirical finding is worthy of note. Going into the research, the expectation was that the largest teachers' union, SADTU, would play a significant role in shaping school-level dynamics, using its power to influence appointments, and assert control more generally. We also expected to see evidence of political parties using the power of appointment for patronage purposes. While we did find a few instances, in general we found that in both provinces hyper-local school-level dynamics were decisive; generally, these were at most loosely linked to these broader union and political influences. For the Western Cape, this likely reflected the relatively robust role played by the WCED's industrial relations department, which engaged unions in a collaborative rather than top-down manner. For the Eastern Cape, it was perhaps more a symptom of the generalized fragmentation of the province's politics. Though surprising, this finding is consistent with the observation of a seasoned scholar/practitioner of South African education, Nick Taylor (quoted in Jansen, 2015) that:

When I entered the National Education Evaluation Unit in South Africa's Department of Basic Education I thought SADTU was a huge problem... But the more I got into the data... I began to realize that there is a bigger problem. The biggest problem is the poor management in many parts of the system. Where management is weak, unions do what they do...

## **10.4 Orchestrating Change**

The research presented in this book has documented uneven governance at every level of South Africa's educational system. School-level governance turns out to be something of a 'hit or miss' affair, with outcomes dependent

on hyper-local dynamics between developmental and predatory actors. Provincial-level education bureaucracies have been bogged down by systemic political and institutional constraints in some provinces, and caught up in a cycle of mediocrity in others where the broader constraints seem less binding. National-level policy compromises made to accommodate influential actors (explored in depth in Chapters 2 and 3) have resulted in the prioritization of ‘rules of the game’ which give little more than lip service to quality. The result is an education system in which all too many pupils go to school, but fail to learn.

At the same time, much is known in South Africa as well as elsewhere as to the kinds of pedagogy that can be effective in fostering learning among children from poor, historically deprived backgrounds. For governance, too, there are abundant studies which explore rigorously the efficacy or otherwise of specific interventions.<sup>5</sup>

Given the urgency of the task, and the seeming availability of knowledge as to how better outcomes can be achieved, the temptation is strong to embrace a ‘just do it’ approach to reform—to argue that getting better results is simply a matter of political will, of the consolidation of power, and mobilization of the will necessary to use that power. However, as both the global experience of efforts at education sector reform and the findings of this study underscore, a ‘just do it’ approach is misguided. Effective reform requires a more skilful way of engaging with the stubborn governance realities that have made it difficult to translate the global commitment to universal education into genuine gains in learning. This final section uses a systems perspective to explore why it has been so difficult, in South Africa and elsewhere, to address the challenges of governance (and other) reforms in the education sector—and how these challenges might be addressed more effectively.

### 10.4.1 *A Complex System*

In recent years, spurred by the proliferation of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and other robust methods of impact evaluation, the discourse on policy reform (in education and elsewhere) often has proceeded along the following lines: identify robustly what works, then scale it up. Yet translating micro-level findings into reforms that make a difference at scale has proven elusive. The central reason, suggests the 2018 World Development Report,

<sup>5</sup> However, for reasons explored throughout this section, all of this evidence should be interpreted through Pritchett’s (2015:7) dictum that ‘pretty much everything everyone believes is the key element of better schools has, by now, been rigorously disproved to have an impact on student learning somewhere. Of course, many of these same notions have also been rigorously proven to have an impact on student learning’.

*Learning to Realize Education's Promise*, is that agendas for 'scaling-up' generally are derived from linear extrapolation of specific cause-effect relationships. However, the challenge of working at scale looks very different once education is considered from a broader, systemic perspective.

Pritchett (2015: 11) defines a 'system' as 'a collection of elements or actors, each of which has its own objectives and a collection of feedback loops connecting the elements/actors'. Figure 10.3, taken from the 2018 World Development Report, illustrates for education. It distinguishes among three levels of the system. At the centre is learning. In the middle level are the proximate drivers of learning: learners, and the extent to which they are prepared (nutritionally, by their family environment, and otherwise) to learn; teachers, and the distinctive skills and motivations they bring to the endeavour; the availability of the inputs (infrastructure, textbooks and other teaching materials) which support the learning environment); and school management. At the outer level are the very many actors who influence the proximate drivers, and thus learning. The different parts are linked through myriad relationships which shape the incentives and constraints on learning.

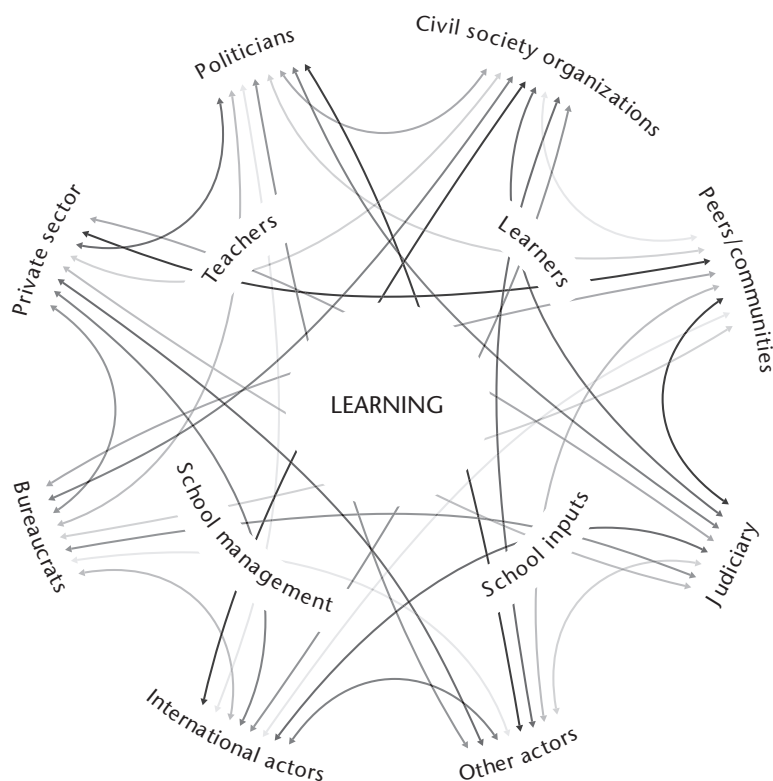


Figure 10.3. The education system



For a system to be ‘coherent’ (that is, in balance/equilibrium), the goals and incentives of the various actors need to be aligned with one another. This complicates the challenge of education sector reform. As the 2018 World Development Report puts it:

The multiplicity of actors and institutions in an education system makes the outcomes of efforts to improve learning unpredictable. . . . Many systems are stuck in low-learning traps [in which] actors lack either the incentives or the support needed to focus on learning . . . . As actors juggle multiple objectives . . . it often is in the interest of each to maintain the status quo—even if society, and many of these actors, would be better off if they could shift to a higher-quality equilibrium.<sup>6</sup>

Ideas as well as interests shape how a system functions. Each of the many actors identified in Figure 10.3 have particular interests. But interests do not function in an ideational vacuum. As Lavers (2016), Lavers and Hickey (2015), World Bank (2015) and Evans (2017) explore in depth, they commonly are accompanied by a set of ideas which offer a narrative as to what goals are desirable, and what means are plausible. Where this underlying narrative varies widely among stakeholders, conflict can be endemic. Where a system is in equilibrium (high or low), the ideas are likely to be widely shared, explicitly or implicitly. Understanding how low-level equilibrium traps take hold and are sustained thus requires careful attention to both the interests of the stakeholders who influence the system, and the ideas which they hold vis-à-vis the system’s functioning.

### 10.4.2 *Hierarchical and Horizontal Governance—Some Low-Level Equilibrium Traps*

Questions as to the potential and limits of hierarchical and horizontal governance turn out to be especially deeply intertwined with normative ideas as to how a ‘good’ society should be organized. Thus, while to this point the principal focus of the study has been on the interactions between interests and governance, to understand the potential and obstacles to reform, it is helpful to also bring ideas into the picture. Building on the research findings laid out earlier, this subsection explores how interests and ideas can result in continuing low-level equilibrium traps, vis-à-vis both hierarchical and horizontal governance.

To begin with hierarchical governance, as summarized earlier in this chapter, differences in socio-economic and political contexts and in institutional legacies from the apartheid era emerged in the present research as central in accounting for differences in bureaucratic performance in South Africa’s Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces. The Eastern Cape’s Department of

<sup>6</sup> World Bank (2018: 12, 13, 15, 178).

Education performed poorly, but deep-seated political and institutional constraints rendered infeasible the prospect of more than marginal improvements in its functioning. In the Western Cape, the contextual constraints are less binding, but educational outcomes remain disappointing.

But notwithstanding the evidence as to its limitations, in countries where education has long been organized around public bureaucracies, the ideational commitment runs deep to targeting improvements in hierarchical management as the key to better outcomes. Argumentation along these lines can point to multiple examples of successful, hierarchical systems—from (historically) France, to Russia, to Japan and Vietnam—as illustrations of what can be achieved. But the arena of education reform also is replete with examples of hierarchical systems whose performance fails to improve, notwithstanding cycle after cycle of ambitious efforts at reform. To cite just two of many possible examples: Malaysia's educational outcomes continue to lag its South East Asian peers, notwithstanding five major curricular and pedagogy reforms within the past two decades, none of which addressed the hyper-centralized way in which the country's system is organized.<sup>7</sup> Morocco's hyper-centralized system also has been the focus of repeated, high-profile reform efforts which, again, neither addressed the hyper-centralized structure, nor yielded the hoped-for results.<sup>8</sup>

As the 2018 World Development Report suggests, one reason why so many countries become trapped in endless cycles of bureaucratic reforms which lead nowhere is a failure to distinguish between the 'coherence' of reforms and whether or not they are aligned towards learning. As Pritchett (2015: 33) argues, bureaucratic reform often centres around 'process compliance', a pattern of

bureaucratic management in which teachers/principals' accountability is basically for enrolments and the operation of 'schooling'... While there might be some vague reference to children actually acquiring needed competencies... 'process

<sup>7</sup> Tzu Lyn Phang provided the background research for Malaysia. The Malaysian reforms are: the 1997 Malaysia Smart School Project; the 2003 curriculum, English in the Teaching of Mathematics and Science; the 2006 National Education Blueprint; the 2011–15 new Standard Primary School Curriculums, and the 2013 Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–25, with the latter part of the broader Big Fast Results initiative facilitated by the Performance Management and Delivery Unit established in the Prime Minister's office; there currently is optimism that the last of these might yield better results than the earlier efforts.

<sup>8</sup> Sarah Kouhlani-Nolla provided the background research for Morocco. One reform was initiated in 1999 shortly after King Mohammed VI came to power, when a new Ministry of National Education was established and initiated curricular, pedagogical and examination changes under the rubric of a National Charter of Education. Disappointment with the results led to the launch in 2009 of a National Education Emergency Plan. Disappointment with this effort led to a new reform initiative in 2012, and then a new long-term, fifteen-year perspective, launched in 2015 by the Ministry of National Education.

compliance is, in and of itself and with no reference to outcomes, completely adequate for discharging accountability.

Process compliance can be useful as a veneer which covers the reality of a patronage-driven bureaucracy. It can also take on an ideational life of its own. Indeed, one plausible explanation for the continuing limitations of the WCED is that it has been so deeply immersed in 'hierarchy as process compliance' for so long that repeated efforts at fostering performance management have repeatedly been re-interpreted through a process-compliance lens, undercutting their potential for re-orienting the bureaucracy towards learning.

For horizontal governance, too, interests and ideas interact in accounting for the patterns which persist in South Africa, but with some unusual features relative to other countries. Grindle (2004), taking a broad, systemic perspective, explores in depth for Latin America how efforts to decentralize the governance of education to subnational and school levels were resisted by interests who derived their power from control over bureaucratic hierarchies. In Mexico, Bolivia and Ecuador, resistance by alliances of the bureaucracy and teachers' unions to efforts to shift authority downwards resulted in a scaling back of the reform agenda. By contrast, reform progressed rapidly, and resulted in major gains in quality in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, where teachers' unions were less relentlessly opposed to a decentralization of responsibilities down the system.

In South Africa, by contrast, there might seem at first glance to be a more open path for leveraging horizontal governance to improve educational outcomes. For one thing, by contrast to the struggles and only partial gains achieved in Latin America, the 1996 South African Schools Act accords substantial authority to school governing bodies (SGBs). For another, the case study evidence summarized in section 10.3 highlights the potential of horizontal governance as an entry point for improving educational outcomes. The case studies show that strong developmental coalitions can provide a 'floor' or support for enhanced decision-making<sup>9</sup>—supporting performance-oriented school principals, and serving as a counterweight to capture. Further, the evidence suggests that school-level dynamics are fluid, raising the possibility that, for at least a subset of schools, pro-active interventions can tilt the balance between developmental and predatory influences in favour of the former. As discussed further below, there is abundant experience from around the world of successful interventions to support horizontal governance. Yet the potential largely has been ignored.

<sup>9</sup> For this point, see also Hoadley, Christie, and Ward (2009).

A review conducted for this study (Eberhard, 2016) found that outside of the small minority of historically elite, English and Afrikaans medium schools, the South African government has made almost no effort, successful or unsuccessful, to support participatory governance. Further, a 2003 review of school governance (Soudien, 2003) commissioned by the national Minister of Education, and led by an eminent and experienced scholar and educator, identified some key obstacles to horizontal governance in poor communities and put forward a series of proposals as to how the obstacles might be overcome; the report was never released. Even more troubling has been the policy response to a more recent ministerial review report (Department of Basic Education, 2016) which explored corruption in the recruitment of teachers. The report identified a variety of weaknesses in the recruitment processes, but only one of its recommendations found its way into an amendment proposed in late 2017 to amend SASA (RSA, 2017)—namely a proposal to sharply circumscribe the role of school governing bodies (SGBs) in school-level recruitment and appointments processes.

A plausible explanation for this continuing neglect can be found in the ways in which interests, power and ideas interact with one another. As noted earlier, momentum for the empowerment of SGBs came via two sources: the interests of affluent parents who had been beneficiaries of apartheid-era public schooling; and those anti-apartheid activists who had embraced a participatory vision of democracy. While the former comprised influential stakeholders with a compelling personal interest in SGB policies, the impetus from the latter turned out to be weak.

To be sure, as of the mid-1990s, popular democracy might have appeared to be part of the DNA of South Africa's liberation struggle: hundreds of community groups had come together under the umbrella of the United Democratic Front (UDF); their efforts helped bring down apartheid. Indeed, participatory governance was embraced by the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which served as the ANC's election manifesto in 1994. But within a few years, the participatory vision receded into the background. Why?

One common explanation is that, with the announcement of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy in 1996, this participatory democratic vision was hijacked by 'neoliberal', technocratic interests. Hijackings aside, there were multiple other reasons why the momentum for popular democracy declined with the ANC's accession to power. A practical reason is that, having won the election, the ANC needed to govern. To staff its government, it turned to many of the activist-intellectuals who had been part of the UDF. The consequence, in the education sector as well as elsewhere was to deplete the leadership of the organizations which had been at the vanguard of the push for popular democracy (Woolman and Fleisch, 2009: 111).

There also were more fundamental reasons for a narrow embrace of hierarchical, less participatory approaches to governing:

Black civil society . . . had emerged and developed in a context of extreme repression and absolute exclusion, and had as such little experience of transacting with the state. The transition to majority rule thus represented both a political and institutional rupture. The vacuum of authority was quickly filled by the ANC. As an organization in exile that was constantly threatened by the apartheid state, the ANC had developed extremely disciplined organizational structures, including clear lines of command that proved far more effective in establishing its power in the transition period than the decentralization and flat organizational structures of civil society. (Heller, 2009: 142)

This 'had devastating consequences for ideological and organizational diversity represented by grassroots organizations affiliated to the UDF' (Madlingozi, 2007: 85).

The ANC's predispositions aligned well with the deeply-rooted hierarchical culture of the apartheid-era bureaucracy inherited by the new government:

Confronted with an unruly reality as they attempted to place their stamp on society after assuming office, government strategists who had expected office to confer the power to remake society often saw centralization and 'co-ordination' as a means of ensuring the predictability and certainty after which they hankered . . . These approaches, which were repeatedly buttressed by a public policy debate which repeatedly insisted that it is the prime function of government to 'deliver' to citizens rather than articulate their voice, imply that, because citizens value the fruits of 'delivery' more than intangibles such as voice or participation, the latter are at best a luxury to be enjoyed when they do not impede the technical supply of services, at worst a hindrance because the substitute talk for urgently required action. (Friedman, 2005: 766–7)

In the context of a culture of 'process compliance', and in the face of the inevitable political pressures of patronage, 'delivery' has not worked out as planned. In consequence, there has indeed been something of a resurgence of civic activism. Perhaps unsurprisingly given South Africa's history of political struggle, this activism has expressed itself principally through the oppositional discourse of 'social movements'—a discourse which, in the early 2010s, earned South Africa something of a renewed reputation as 'the protest capital of the world'.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The quote is from Habib (2013: 60); see also Madlingozi (2007).

### 10.4.3 *Cumulative Incrementalism*

The findings of this book pose a dilemma for education reform. At all levels (national, provincial, and school), the quality of governance is shown to have a strong influence on educational outcomes. But the observed governance patterns turn out to be shaped by the broader institutional and political context—with the potential for 'fixing' governance weaknesses constrained by that context. This final subsection suggests a way of dealing with this dilemma.

The suggested approach combines two complementary aspects of reform—practical initiatives which take into account the role of interests in constraining reform, plus a broader reframing of the ideas surrounding how the provision of education and other public services might be improved. The overall aim is to initiate a process which proceeds deliberately, and incrementally, maintaining stability, while cumulatively building momentum for re-orientating the system as a whole towards learning.

For many decades, South Africa's education system has been buffeted by wave after wave of change. The 1976 uprising of school pupils initiated a grass-roots struggle for political change, with the slogan 'no education before liberation' characterizing at least part of the struggle. As Chapter 2 details, between 1994 and 1998, far-reaching institutional and fiscal transformations (unprecedented globally in their scope) were undertaken. Curriculum and pedagogical transformations also were set in motion, with adjustments (some major) continuing to 2012. Only since the mid-2000s could the new system be described as broadly stable—and there is some evidence that, with stability, outcomes are beginning to improve, albeit from an astonishingly low base. Table 10.4 illustrates, with data on South Africa's performance in the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); added information is provided in Chapters 2 and 7.

The risks are high that a new round of 'transformational' reform would short-circuit the process of consolidation, and reverse the limited gains which have been achieved. Indeed, experience the world over suggests that the longer-run impacts of 'bold' efforts to achieve reform by confronting vested interests (notably including teachers' unions) can be highly uncertain. As Grindle (2004) shows for Latin America, such confrontations rarely result in 'victory', but instead usher in a period of considerable turbulence. The 2018 World Development Report takes a similarly cautious view. It contrasts reforms in Poland and in Chile. In Poland, large-scale changes in the structure of the education sector remained unpopular, with ongoing pressures to scrap them, notwithstanding evidence of success. In Chile, by contrast, incremental cumulative reforms over a decade, beginning in 1996, built strong momentum

## The Politics and Governance of Basic Education

**Table 10.4.** TIMSS Performance—Provincial Comparisons Across Years

Province	TIMSS 2003 (Gr 8 & 9)	TIMSS 2011 (Gr. 9)	TIMSS 2015 (Gr. 9)
	Average math. score	Average math. score	Average math. Score
Western Cape	414	404	391
Gauteng	303	389	408
Eastern Cape	250	316	346
Free State	291	359	367
KwaZulu-Natal	278	337	369
Limpopo	244	322	361
Mpumulanga	287	344	370
Northern Cape	341	366	364
North West	280	350	354
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>368</b>

Source: See Chapter 6 for details and discussion

for change, including support from the teachers' union. Based on these and other experiences, the World Development Report concludes that:

A gradual, negotiated approach to reform may work better than confrontation. Where coalitions of system actors foster collaboration among shared goals, reforms are more likely to succeed... Even if evidence shows that the reforms improve learning, their sustainability is at risk when they are misunderstood or unpopular among system actors. (2018: 204)

The evidence in this book points to a variety of practical, incremental reforms vis-à-vis both hierarchical and horizontal governance. For hierarchical governance, one crucial task is to continue to strengthen the 'transmission belt' through which emerging lessons about effective pedagogy are disseminated throughout the system. A second task is to fine-tune the interactions between the bureaucracy and SGBs in appointments processes, especially for school principals. In recent years, operating within the framework set by SASA, the WCED has introduced psychometric competency assessments for candidates for principal, used early retirement options to encourage principals in poorly-performing schools to retire, and ensured (informally) that successor principals in poorly performing schools come from outside the school. But note that efforts to use strengthened hierarchy to improve principal selection are likely to add value only in settings where hierarchy already works relatively well—in settings where hierarchies are more politicized, the consequence could simply be to create new risks of school-level capture with patronage-oriented decision-making upstream in the bureaucracy.

Turning to horizontal governance, the findings in this book suggest that it can be a useful complement in settings where education bureaucracies are relatively capable—and can also be a value adding institutional substitute in settings where bureaucracies are dysfunctional. As discussed earlier, South

Africa's point of departure for leveraging the potential benefits of horizontal governance are more favourable than Grindle's Latin American cases as it already has in place (via the 1996 Schools Act) an institutional architecture which fully empowers SGBs. What has been missing are efforts from either public sector or non-governmental stakeholders to breathe life into that architecture—especially in low-income communities which (given the country's apartheid history and political struggle) lack experience of participatory, collaborative approaches to service provision.

How might such initiatives be designed? As the school-level case studies suggest, the core challenge is less one of 'capacity' than of empowering developmentally-oriented stakeholders at the school-level. Given the large number of schools, a school-by-school approach would be too demanding of the limited capacity available. An alternative might be to focus on interventions capable of influencing the dynamics of multiple schools in a more 'wholesale' way—linking developmentally-minded SGBs and other local stakeholders with one another, rather than working one-by-one. The aim would not be to transform all schools: in some schools, positive governance dynamics might already be in place; in others, predatory capture might be too powerfully locked-in to dislodge.

Experience in other countries points to a wide range of approaches through which countries have successfully worked at scale to improve participatory governance, with (as shown in some impact evaluations) a positive effect on learning outcomes. Some of these approaches focus directly on training parents and communities; others train trainers, with the process cascading down to the school level; others work with clusters of schools; and others focus on learning-by-doing, combining training with finance and support for implementation of small-scale school projects.<sup>11</sup> What seemingly holds South Africa back from embracing approaches along these lines is their disjuncture with prevailing ideas as to what it takes for a society to successfully engage in the challenges of public service provision.

To complement the pragmatic reforms highlighted above, what might be the potential of broader reframing of the ideas surrounding how the provision of education and other public services can be improved? Such a reframing would re-engage from a pragmatic perspective, some of the participatory ideas

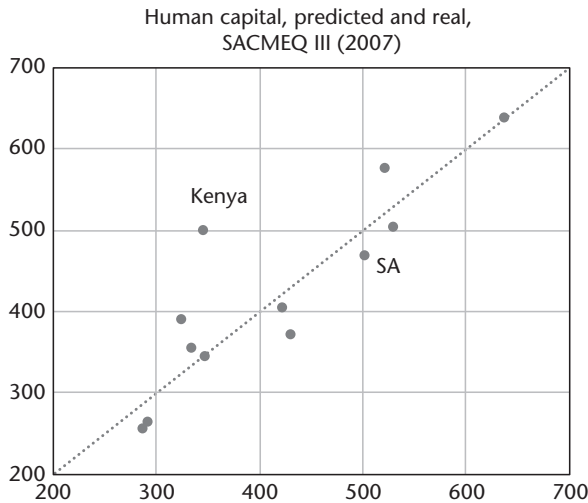
<sup>11</sup> Among programmes implemented at scale, Ghana provides an example of direct training support (Social Impact, 2014); Guinea of a training of trainers approach (Garnier et al., 2005; Midling et al., 2006); Haiti (American Institutes for Research, 2001; 2004) and Nigeria (Healey, 2016) examples of cluster-based approaches; and Honduras (World Bank, 2009) of an approach which combine training with finance and support for implementation of small-scale school projects. Bruns, Filmer, and Patrinos (2011) synthesize the results of the impact evaluations of a rich array of approaches to strengthen school-level transparency and participatory management, some robust (but small-scale) randomized controlled trials, and other interventions at scale.



which had currency in mid-1990s South Africa. Inevitably, the discussion is somewhat speculative—but to provide both inspiration and a sense as to what might be the possible impact on education it is helpful to look at experience elsewhere, specifically that of Kenya.

A useful point of departure is the striking fact that, controlling for a variety of exogenous factors, the performance of the Western Cape education system lags substantially behind that of Kenya, notwithstanding the Western Cape having almost five times the level of human resources. Figure 10.4 illustrates the extent to which Kenya is a positive outlier. The country’s success can hardly be attributed to the quality of its education bureaucracy: Kenya is notorious for its high levels of corruption; patronage permeates the public sector. What seems to have made the difference are the ‘softer’ dimensions of governance. Consider the following description from a long-time practitioner/observer of the Kenyan education system:

What one sees in rural Kenya is an expectation for kids to learn and be able to have basic skills . . . Exam results are far more readily available in Kenya than other countries in the region. The ‘mean scores’ for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and equivalent KCSE at secondary school are posted in every school and over time so that trends can be seen. Head teachers are held accountable for those results



**Figure 10.4.** Kenya’s educational outcomes in comparative perspective  
*Note:* The x-axis of the figure shows predicted scores for 2007 on the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) test controlling for a variety of exogenous factors. The y-axis shows actual scores.  
*Source:* Chapter 2

to the extent of being paraded around the community if they did well, or literally banned from school and kicked out of the community if they did badly.<sup>12</sup>

As Appendix A10.1 explores in detail, the roots of active civic engagement in the education sector run deep in the foundational ideas which shaped modern Kenya: in a decades-long effort to resist British colonial influence; in the vision of the country's liberation struggle leader and first president, Jomo Kenyatta, of an educated population as the central manifestation what it means to be a proud independent nation; in the inclusion of education as top priority in the country's first national plan; and in an abiding commitment in the first decade of the country's independence to *Harambee*—'self-help'—as the pathway to development, with education holding pride of place within the Harambee movement. The contrast could not be starker between this Kenyan vision and the South African vision of service 'delivery' by government.

Against that backdrop, consider the call for 'active citizenship' in South Africa's 2012 National Development Plan:

Active citizenship requires inspirational leadership at all levels of society... Leadership does not refer to one person, or even a tight collective of people. It applies in every aspect of life... To build an inclusive nation the country needs to find ways to promote a positive cycle, where an effective state, inspirational leadership across all levels of society, and active citizens reinforce and strengthen each other. (The Presidency, National Planning Commission, 2012)

If South Africa were actually to embrace active citizenship as the path to improving outcomes, the consequences for the education system could be far-reaching. In many schools, an activated citizenry could decisively shift the balance between developmental and predatory actors in favour of the former. Within the bureaucracy, new momentum could emerge for learning-oriented engagement, surfacing the limits of pre-occupations with 'process compliance' for its own sake, or for fostering access without an explicit focus on actual learning. Teacher unions might increasingly embrace a vision of teaching as a profession, as a calling, and move decisively away from a narrow pre-occupation with the rights of teachers as employees. New possibilities would arise for adapting national policies in ways that enhance a focus on educational outcomes. Civil society activism might more systematically target those aspects of education-sector governance which have strong impacts on learning.

<sup>12</sup> Personal communication, 9 January 2017 from Benjamin Piper, RTI Senior Director of Africa Education, based in Nairobi, Kenya. Quoted by permission. In an econometric analysis, Bold et al. (2010) show that high levels of parental and community support were indeed associated with persistently better support in the KCPE exams.

The glow of South Africa's political miracle has long faded. But as of the time of completing this book, it seems just possible that the country may perhaps be beginning to confront the reality that the end of apartheid was just one (giant) step along the path of meeting the challenge of inclusive, economic as well as political liberation for all. To move forward, South Africa could do much worse than—learning from Kenya at the time of its independence—putting education at the centre of a vision of people-centred development, in a way in which realizing the potential becomes the task of all of the country's citizens. A top-down vision of 'education for all' is insufficient to meet the frontier challenge of improving outcomes. What is called for now is 'all for education'.

### Appendix A10.1: Accounting for Kenya's Educational Performance<sup>13</sup>

This appendix provides some historical background to the assertion in the chapter that 'soft governance' accounts for Kenya being a positive outlier (at least through to 2007) relative to its Southern and East African comparators—with these soft governance strengths rooted in large part in the country's struggle to shake off the shackles of colonialism. Four aspects of this struggle appear especially salient.

First, dating back to the 1920s, an independent schools movement had emerged as a weapon in resistance to colonial influence. Early resistance came from the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), founded in 1921 to protest against colonial land policies. Within a decade, education had become an effective new arena for struggle:

The Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (KISA), and the African Independent Pentecostal Church, which fused orthodox Christianity with Kikuyu tribal traditions, became the focal points for the growing anti-European feeling of young Africans... Legal means of getting their rights—the endless unsuccessful lawsuits and the pointless petitions the government ignored—had been fruitless and frustrating. The law was a dead end: the settlers and the colonial administration were too strong and were set against them. Now they had a platform based on culture and religion, and the public was ready to move. The new schools and the new church bred others; another school movement and another church group, even more militant and aggressive, formed in competition. But if they couldn't agree with each other, they all agreed in opposing the missions. In the next couple of years the effects were spectacular. The KCA's inflammatory speeches drew natives away from the mission schools and congregations in droves. The Church of Scotland mission in Kikuyu province lost 90% of its members, and the Africa Inland Mission even more. (Wepman, 1985: 47–8)

Following World War Two, conflict between the independent schools movement and the colonial authorities erupted afresh, culminating in the forced closure of the

<sup>13</sup> This appendix draws on very useful background research by Sarah Pfund, plus helpful informal inputs from David Throup.

schools (which were perceived to be a source of the Mau Mau rebellion) for much of the 1950s (Wepman, 1985; Fischer, 1977).

Second, the personal history of Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya's first president and a major figure in the country's liberation struggle) was deeply intertwined with education as a form of resistance:

- Born in the 1890s, he was educated in mission schools.
- In the 1920s, he became active in the KCA, which (building on his mission school experience, and fluency in English) he used as a platform to advocate for better-quality education for Africans, within a framework of cultural nationalism.
- Upon returning to Kenya in the later 1940s (after fifteen years living in Europe) to take up leadership of the Kenya African Union (later the ruling party, KANU), he also became director and principal of the Kenya African Teachers College, founded by his brother-in-law, and run by the independent schools movement (Fischer, 1977).
- He was jailed in 1952, and released in 1961 resuming active leadership of KANU, becoming the first president of independent Kenya in December, 1963.

Third, education emerged as among the very top early priorities of independent Kenya. Thus:

In 1964, a special Education Commission was established to review how the education system could be used to build national identity, encourage racial and ethnic intermixing and support development. (Hornsby, 2012)

Education featured centrally in Kenya's 1966 development plan, which asserted that 'education is more than simply preparation for the university or training for clerical jobs. Our farmers need education and so do the workers' (Fischer, 1977: ii–iii).

Fourth, in June 1963, Kenyatta offered a vision of an independent Kenya imbued with *Harambee* ('let us pull together') (Kenyatta, 1964); in December, the country adopted the term as its official national motto. By the early 1980s, over 20,000 Harambee associations had registered with government; these associations had become 'the principal vehicle through which local communities exerted claims on the state... the most important arena of rural political life... Over time, the emergence of Harambee, combined with the regular holding of elections, established a measure of national political accountability by linking state and society together'. (Barkan, 1994: 19). Engagement with education held pride of place within the Harambee movement:

In an upsurge of protest, Africans mobilized during colonial rule to launch an underground educational movement in order to vie for increased social power and status. This movement latter became known as the Harambee school movement... Harambee or self-help schools became a vital aspect of Kenya's secondary school system. (Dinavo, 1990: 4)

Harambee was not just a political slogan, a rallying point, or an idea looking for an occasion to manifest itself. For education in particular, Harambee had a meaning all of its own; it was a very influential reality, especially in the area of secondary education... Politicians, concerned with their public image and their re-electability, yielded to public demands for more education... Available funds were running short... The demand and pressure for more schools continued

to grow. In this spiral of conflict between demand and ability to supply, Kenyatta's call for Harambee—let's pull together—seemed to contain the answer. (Fischer, 1977: 81–3)

Along with the above, two subsequent developments must also be noted. One is the introduction in 1978 of the standardized countrywide test, the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, under the leadership of Kenyatta's successor Daniel Arap Moi, himself a former schoolteacher; this test provided the information platform through which communities hold school staff to account, as described in the body of the chapter. The second is the repeated pressure for free primary education, which culminated in a new policy in 2003 which went beyond exhortation and banned the imposition of school levies and other cost-sharing mechanisms (Somerset, 2009). The policy resulted in a sudden increase in the number of pupils; Grade 1 enrolments rose from 970,000 in 2002 to 1.3 million in 2003. But it also had the unintended consequence of reducing the commitment of parents to schools, resulting in a subsequent exit of children to low-fee private schools (Bold et al., 2010).

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