



The school system in Sri Lanka is a vast enterprise which, cater to the needs of 4.2 million students. The teacher force amounting to nearly 190,000 teachers consists of almost one fourth of the entire public sector servants. Sri Lanka's Education system is unique in its efforts to introduce new innovations. In 1945 a free education scheme from the kindergarten to the university was introduced. This was followed by the adoption of mother tongue as the medium of instruction. In the 1940s a special category of schools, named as Central Schools were established in distant cities to provide deserving students from the villages to receive an equally better education as the privileged. In the late 1950s and 1960s, Science teaching was extended to secondary grades of better developed schools in the rural areas which was until then limited exclusively to few privileged urban schools. In early 1960s practically all private schools were taken under state control. To move away from the academic curriculum, island wide reforms were introduced in 1972, life skills in 1984 and continuous assessment in 1986. The Cluster school system was introduced in 1981 and School Development Boards in 1993. The country also introduced several welfare measures at regular intervals, some of which are; scholarships to children from lower income families, free text books to all, free mid day meals to all, a free uniform scheme and subsidised bus fares. Though some of the innovations did not last long the efforts have to be admired.

Even in Educational Administration as far back as 1979 the country had realised that schools can do better if not imprisoned in a uniform set of national directives. The Report of the Education reforms Committee – 1979, "Towards Relevance in Education", has stated,

Move Towards School Autonomy: Can School Based Management Help Achieve It?

Wilfred J. Perera

Director, Education Management, National Institute of Education

"There is no denying that some of our schools possess wide variety of talents and excellence. The uniform application of policy in all schools alike, however has tended to heighten rather than heal the imbalances between the developed and under-developed sections of the system, while national standards in management, discipline and quality of education have remained stagnant."

A three-fold strategy had been proposed at that time in order to improve school functioning.

- (1) Recognition of the key-role of Heads of schools
- (2) Reduction of the very wide gap between the smallest and poorest equipped remote schools and the well equipped very large schools.
- (3) The need to foster greater community participation in the management of schools.

In 1984 recommendations were made for substantive delegation of power to the schools. The Report on Management Reforms in the Ministry of Education (1984) very strongly viewed principals as first line managers of the ministry and recommended that adequate authority be delegated to them. The report suggested that the role of the principal should to be transformed from that of a representative of a government department to that of a dynamic leader. On both these occasions

the recommendations remained at the suggestion level. The next step towards school autonomy was the establishment of School Development Boards by a Parliament Act in February 1993. Some of the main functions of the Board were to be, to advise and assist the principal, to assess and assist in the current needs and performance of the school; to recommend relevant improvements to curricula; to promote greater collaboration among parents; to assist in the development and maintenance of the infrastructure of the school and assist in the development of the personality of the pupils by sharing with the members of the school community. However the school boards were abolished in February 1995.

Though the country had taken several noteworthy steps towards the decentralization of educational administration with a view of upgrading operational efficiency the effects were marginal. The process of decentralization was mainly concerned with establishing layers between the central ministry and the school with the view of bringing management closer to the school. Though the geographical units of administration have shifted from the central to the middle levels, the pattern in which schools function did almost remained unchanged. By 1994 there were four layers between the central ministry





and the school, namely, the provincial ministry, the provincial department, the zonal office and the divisional office. This often created problems to the school, and several issues have been identified by a number of studies.

1. There were instances where the schools were subjected to multiple control by the different layers.
2. These layers were responsible to help the schools to function better. But in fact these layers (institutes) themselves did not have a work ethic. Some of the offices could not initiate or facilitate any development for schools.
3. The coordination between the different layers was minimal.
4. The layers were established to break lengthy procedures. But there was evidence that administrative procedures had become longer.

This reveals that a more comprehensive and complete package with more determination and careful preparation need to be introduced if schools are to work with more autonomy. Most functions carried out by the above layers could be delegated to the school level. The Reforms in General Education (1997) stresses the need to adopt School Based Management to make School functioning more effective.

"School Based Management has been accepted as an effective tool in the management of schools. . . It should specifically state the power, authority and responsibilities of the principal and the Senior Management group of the school. There shall be a Council of Management for each school comprising the Principal, representatives of the

staff, parents, past pupils and well-wishers and a departmental nominee to assist the Principal in the formulation of policy and preparation of development plans and monitoring the implementation thereof."

The Reforms also suggest that equitable allocation of resources should be assured by giving a grant to the schools based on the unit costs. In order to alleviate disparities in the allocation of resources, a grant would be calculated as per-student rate. The transfers of teachers will be effected only at the beginning of the year and the concurrence of the principal of the school should be obtained before the transfer letters are issued.

The emergence of SBM in Sri Lanka has to be viewed, firstly, within the overall package of reforms that is introduced to the Sri Lankan education system; secondly within the broader context of socio-economic and political changes that is taking place in the country; and thirdly within the context of the international SBM movement. Efficiency and productivity has become overriding priorities for institutions and schools are no exception. Restructuring the education system in order to improve public spending by monitoring outputs against inputs has become vital. If services are to be made more responsive to those who use them, then decision-making has to be decentralized. The need for School Based Management in Sri Lanka springs from several factors.

- I. The individual school is submerged in an all-island set of general macro programmes. The schools do not seem to make a conscious effort to diagnose their organization and initiate essential organizational changes. In spite of the decentralization measures taken, most schools yet blindly follow the script

sent from the centre. The principal remains a representative of the Zonal or divisional office. There is the need to get the school to design and develop its long-term and short-term plans to achieve school objectives and deliver them.

2. Most schools have not identified the reservoir of potential energy both human and physical and hence these resources go unutilized. Schools do not attempt to solve their problems, develop infrastructure or generate resources. These are passed on to the hierarchy. Schools in Sri Lanka function from 8.00 hours 14.00 hours and with the exception of some schools in the others the buildings are not used outside these hours. There are a number of schools which has under-utilized land either for educational purposes or for fund generation that could eventually be used for education and welfare of students. Schools need to take more autonomy to make decisions on the generation, allocation and utilization of resources.
3. The country has a predominant rural sector. Though it consists of only 65,056 square kilometers in land area, varied climatic conditions and diverse geographical variations enrich it. This provides diverse employment opportunities and in addition to the plantation settlements there is a vast fishing sector. Lack of curricula diversification at local level in the Junior Secondary or Senior Secondary levels has created a widening mismatch between education and the world of work. Only a handful of schools in the urban/semi-urban sector attempt to link themselves with the expanding private sector in order to provide its pupils with





wider curricular initiatives. There is the need to ensure more academic independence for the school and to take initiatives to offer more interesting and relevant curricula.

4. There is enough research evidence to show that school improvement is related with the community factor. The in-school staff are often planted from outside and the support and encouragement of the parents and community leaders motivates the in-school staff and in fact most initiatives need to come from the community. SBM guarantee the involvement of the community in school planning and in resource management.
5. In Sri Lanka during the last two decades both long-term and short-term teacher courses and training programs are mushrooming. But this has only a marginal impact on school development. The programs focus more on individual teacher development than on school development. Under SBM each school will have a budget for staff development and it is more possible to establish congruence between staff training and school needs.

Further weaknesses can be identified in the present Sri Lankan education system.

- the closed nature of the system which made it unresponsive to local needs;
- administrative and management procedures which are outdated;
- emphasis on schools complying with minor administrative matters whilst not developing strategies to improve the quality of learning and pupil performance;
- over-consideration of examination results as the primary or

the only indicator of the worth of a school and the collective efforts of its staff;

- inefficient use of manpower throughout the education system which results due to under utilization of professional expertise at all levels;
- poor teaching quality due to lack of relevant training and development opportunities being available to the individual teacher;
- undervaluing the classroom teacher who delivers learning to students.

The educationists are of the view that the introduction of school-based management would offer a practical solution to many of the presumed shortcomings in the existing education system. The characteristics of a school-based management system are,

- a level of autonomy which allow the school to determine its own approach to the teaching/learning process;
- the internal allocation of the school's resources and the capacity to plan for the future in partnership with their local communities;
- a developed system of demonstrating the school's accountability to its clients and governmental constituencies;
- a close relationship of the school with the community through representative membership of the school board with whom the principal and the school undertake the creation of school development plans that reflect local educational priorities;
- a school culture that empower staff through open participation in the management of the school where delegation is a normal management feature;
- a recognition by the external authorities that the school has the

capability to organize effective network/system to deliver the curriculum according to local needs within the national curriculum framework;

- the existence of a school-based performance appraisal system of staff that links itself with school-based staff development programme.

The main objective of SBM is to improve the performance of schools. It is based on the underlying assumption that autonomous schools offer a clear vision for the future and are prepared to release the energies of their staff by empowering them to take professional responsibility for raising educational standards. Several doubts have been raised in some quarters of the successful implementation of SBM unless some conditions are met. It is important to raise them so that they are examined and relevant steps taken to meet these pre-conditions. SBM involves greater responsibility and authority to the principal and the selection of principals is crucial. The recruitment procedures of principals have to be formalized and diversified. SBM presupposes that schools differ and if so the right choice has to be made as people also differ and do better in some institutes than in others. Before implementing SBM in a school the authorities have to employ an appropriate method to see that the 'right' person is occupying the job. Under a system of SBM the selection of principals to schools have to be taken seriously. The permanency of the principal also needs to be guaranteed. An assertive principal can become a victim of circumstances in the present Sri Lankan education system. If long-term development of schools is to be assured, a principal has to serve in a school for at least 5 to 8 years.





One major occurrence in school based management is the autonomy given to the school or in other words to the principal and the Senior Management Group. A questionnaire was administered to the principals and the deputy principals of a sample of schools to find out what functions and tasks should be delegated to the school. A group of 152 teachers were met in two separate groups, and the concept of SBM was briefly explained to them. Then they were asked to write down the tasks and functions that should be delegated to the school level. A group of educationists from national and provincial levels and a group of zonal directors were interviewed to find out the functions and responsibilities that should be delegated to the principals when SBM is in operation.

The principals and deputy principals requested that more autonomy be given to schools in the following tasks and functions; selection of teachers, personnel management, school supervision (supervision to be a in-school function), curricular variations, implementation of annual plans, implementation of appropriate co-curricular activities, staff development (school based staff development), student admissions, teacher transfers, selection and deployment of minor employees, student discipline, maintenance of teacher files, to improve on parental participation in school improvement and to buy educational equipment.

Principals and deputy principals irrespective of school category were keen that they be involved in the selection of teachers. They had mentioned that they need to be consulted when teachers are given or removed. Some principals and deputies had specifically mentioned that they wish to be involved in some form, to some

degree in the selection process. Remote school principals had mentioned that teachers should not be removed without replacement. A request made by all categories of school principals was for the principals to have the authority to obtain the services of appropriate persons when specific subject teachers are not available and this request was more frequently made by rural school principals. Several from national schools had requested for the maintenance of school files and the selection and deployment of minor employees though the principals and deputies of the other schools categories had not requested so. There were more requests from national schools for more autonomy in school admissions than from other schools. School based staff development and the strengthening of in-school supervision had been mentioned across all categories of schools. Principals and deputies of all the categories of schools showed a keen interest in having a stronger say to make curricular variations principals of smaller schools had specifically mentioned that they be allowed to take vocational initiatives. Principals and deputies of several schools of all categories wanted freedom to purchase educational equipment and this was most frequently mentioned by the teachers of all categories of schools. The need to have funds and flexible procedures to use them for student welfare was mentioned by several rural school principals though this had not been mentioned by those of national schools. Freedom to organise educational trips with parental consent, more flexibility in organising co-curricular activities, the authority to decide on the school calendar, to organise school examinations were mentioned by some across school categories. It was evident that all categories needed more freedom in financial management. The autonomy in developing the school plant and the infrastructure, the autonomy in the

management of physical resources were mentioned across school categories. They also mentioned that the following need to be guaranteed.

1. Political interference on school management should be prevented.
2. Team management within the school have to be improved.
3. The middle managers or promoted staff should be given formal appointments.
4. The School management Council and School Management Groups and their members should be given job descriptions.
5. Teacher training needs to be made more diversified and effective.
6. Certain circulars need to be amended.

Teachers wanted more autonomy given to schools in personnel management, student welfare, teacher recruitment, maintenance of teacher files, student admissions, curricular variations, to buy educational equipment, school supervision, staff development, student discipline, to improve parental support, student evaluation, to decide school educational trips, financial management and physical plant development.

The teachers from small schools had mentioned that those schools must receive a special grant for student welfare. Some others have mentioned a grant should be given to buy cupboards, black-boards etc.

Twenty-four zonal directors that were interviewed expressed that,

- The principals' consent/ approval should be obtained/ consulted when teachers are sent to the school or when teachers are removed from the school





- If principal requests a transfer of a teacher due to the teacher's negligence that should be considered
 - In-school supervision needs to be strengthened
 - All teacher increments must be based on the recommendation of the principal
 - Principals must be given more power to maintain school discipline
 - Principals have to approve their school time tables
 - Principals should have the freedom to organise educational trips with the consent of the parents
 - Principals must have more freedom to implement specific school development projects/ co-curricular programmes
 - The school must have more freedom to adapt the curriculum to suit the local needs
 - The purchase of educational items need to be entrusted to the school
 - The principal and the SMT should be entrusted with the control of SDS funds and facility fee funds
 - The school may be allowed to collect money/material from the community and NGOs
 - Schools may be allowed to improve their infrastructure and given grants through the SMC for new buildings
 - More authority to make people decisions
 - Teacher performance appraisal by the principal must be considered in teacher promotions without undue external pressure
 - Freedom to communicate and develop linkages with institutes and agencies that help school improvement
 - To plan and conduct school-based staff development programmes
 - To have flexible procedures in obtaining teacher services such as the freedom to get teachers to conduct extra classes and remunerate them or to hire someone outside the cadre to meet specific needs
 - Develop and implement long-term school development plans
 - Implement special projects for school improvement
 - Freedom to design and implement appropriate co-curricular programmes
 - Freedom in making curricula decisions : to make amendments according to the needs of the area
 - Financial freedom to carry out school development plans effectively
 - Fund raising for school activities and school projects
 - Preparation of school budget
 - Freedom in financial management in matters such as meeting electricity, telephone and water bills
 - Improvement and development school plant
 - Financial freedom in the maintenance of school plant
 - To express views in the design of buildings, furniture and to be consulted when buildings are put up and when furniture or equipment is purchased
- The Thirty educationists from national and the provincial levels wanted the following to be delegated to the school level and emphasised the need to give them specific training.
- In the selection of teachers and the non-teaching staff : the principal must be consulted when teachers are transferred out and the principal's request to remove a teacher must be respected

2662 schools (26%) with less than 100 students and 4220 schools (42%) with less than 200 students. The details are given in Table I. How will SBM effect these small schools? What specific measures need to be taken to implement SBM in these schools?, is a fact worth considering.

The MEHE document (1996) has proposed to limit school size to 2000 to prevent uncontrolled growth of popular schools which will also have a positive impact on the other schools. Such a move will have a positive impact on the pupils of popular schools as well. The same document has suggested upgrading of all Junior schools in disadvantaged locations, remote village areas, plantations, the deprived urban centres and the coastal belt, by providing these schools with necessary facilities.

One possibility to adopt for smaller schools would be to group several of them together. 'The report Relevance in Education' (1979) had suggested to introduce the concept of 'school complexes' whereby a number of small schools are identified as one institution for purposes of both administration and management. Several projects initiated by the Education Ministry and the National Institute of Education has proven that neighboring small schools can collaborate with each other in numerous ways towards school improvement. Several principals and teachers of small rural and remote schools in the Western and Uva provinces were interviewed to find out their views and aspirations on SBM. They are of the view that SBM is a timely intervention. However the principals and teachers of small and remote schools expressed the fear that SBM will permit and encourage school inequalities. They are of the opinion that the prestigious or well to do

It is important to consider about the position of small Schools under SBM. The country has a dominant rural sector and most small schools are in rural or remote areas. At present there are





Table 1 - The Student Numbers according to School Type

Number of Students	Type 1AB	Type 1C	Type 2	Type 3	Total
1-50	00	07	69	1177	1253
51-100	03	07	244	1155	1409
101-200	02	33	953	970	1958
201-500	13	533	1887	487	2920
501-1000	102	902	486	142	1632
1001-1500	158	295	57	24	534
1501-2000	117	62	09	05	193
2001-2500	76	13	08	01	98
2501-3000	45	08	00	00	53
3001-3500	36	00	00	00	36
Above 3500	34	00	00	00	34
Total	586	1860	3713	3961	10120

schools will attract better teachers and more resources and imbalances within schools would be accentuated. The principals and deputies of remote schools mentioned that teacher shortages, lack of teacher commitment, economic backwardness of the community, lack of parental interest in the education of their children, lack of basic facilities as some of the issues that need to be addressed.

Sri Lanka can draw from many success and failure stories on SBM highlighted in literature world wide. Bezznia (1997) provides a useful realisation that School-Site Management (SSM) is 'not about money' but 'one of ownership'; SSM should not see school as a 'target of change' but as a 'centre of critical inquiry'. Calvert (1989) is of the view that under SBM, reliance on fund-raising, donations and free use of community and parent volunteers may give rise to several problems. Fund-raising in wealthy communities is more successful than in poor communities, therefore equity problems will emerge. Sackney and Dibski (1994) go on to say that, "Perhaps the greatest single worry of educators and

parents in a decentralised school system is the problem of equity." However it must be stated that in Sri Lanka the existing system too has perpetuated imbalances and the gap keeps widening. Cheng (1993) sees that in 'a complicated, changing and a challenging context school based management as a promising model, but warns (1996) that, 'traditional conception of school-based management is simplistic and narrow and usually ignores the multiplicity of self-management in school'.

According to Gamage (1996) the realisation of set goals of SBM, is a 'time consuming, laborious process which needs pro-active, professional leadership and careful planning'. Evans and Hood (1997) are of the view that 'SBM has presented principals and senior management teams with enormous challenges', but 'its advent has also offered many opportunities and the ones who have seized these opportunities have been able to raise the standards in their schools'. SBM envisages increasing autonomy and making them self managing. But autonomy itself offers constraints. Fidler, Russel and Simkins (1997) provide a useful reference. "Self-management offers many opportunities

to schools. What it cannot do, however, is free them and those who manage and work in them, from the constraints associated working in an economic and political climate which presents major challenges for public sector organisations of all kinds." A number of issues and concerns that emerge through self-management of schools have been highlighted by Cadwell and Spinks (1988). One main concern is to have a framework for accountability. "The school must be managed within a framework of national, state and local guidelines. These guidelines may be in the form of legislation, policies, priorities, and conditions in collective agreements and funding arrangements. The school must be able to demonstrate that these guidelines have been honoured. Three patterns of accountability are suggested in the self-management of schools: accountability to a central authority, accountability to the local community, and accountability to the governing body or appropriate policy group within the school." Murphy and Deck (1995) have intensively explored the reasons of failure of SBM in the western context and conclude that the emphasis had been more on structural reform rather than on an 'organic' change. The latter would provide and create a better 'educational community' to students. They suggest that 'SBM needs to undergo a transformation from a structural form to an organic one'. Leithwood and Menzies (1998) reviewing seventy-seven empirical and case studies have identified a number of obstacles that may be encountered in the implementation of SBM in the early and middle stages. They have categorised their findings for different stakeholders. (i.e. teachers, principals, district administrators, parents and wider community) A country that aspires to introduce SBM could

Contd. on Page 34





Contd. from Page 31

well learn from these findings All these provide a valuable challenge to Sri Lankan policy makers, administrators within and without school and more specifically to capacity builders (trainers) who will have an uphill task ahead of them.

The implementation of SBM in Sri Lanka will not be achieved without some difficulty. There will be significant changes in both role and orientation at every level of the existing education system. The effective implementation of SBM to a great extent depends on the success of its introduction. The preparation of principals and the middle managers in schools who are the key players is vital to ensure successful introduction of SBM. They have to convince the other staff and parents. The mass media has to be used effectively to disseminate information on new ideas and concepts, in order, to reduce the resistance that is likely to be encountered and also to obtain positive support as the stakeholders

will be aware of the advantages of SBM. SBM calls for a greater and active participation of the community in the planning, administration and financing of the schools. It needs to enable students and parents to exercise choice in the type and quality and education they receive. Under SBM schools will be flexible enough to provide student, parent preferences. The community and in-school staff will themselves involve in curricular and budgeting decisions.

Education is a subject on which most people tend to voice strong opinions, but education been a very amorphous subject these opinions are often vague, yet they need to be listened to with patience. Education is a social process. SBM as a reform has to accompany other reforms as well. SBM is not an end in itself but a means to reach greater human aspirations and achievements, which will only be possible with a change in our values and attitudes. ■