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## **Report of the Bikita Quality Education Project (QEP) Review**

*Submitted to SCN Zimbabwe, Harare.*

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## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

BSPZ	Better Schools Programme for Zimbabwe
CRTs	Cluster Resource Teachers
DTE	Department of Teacher Education
D/H	Deputy Head
EO	Education Officer
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
MoESC	Ministry of Education, Sport & Culture
QEP	Quality Education Project
QUAD	Quality Assurance Division
SACMEQ	Southern Africa Consortium for Measurement of Educational Quality
SCN	Save the Children Norway
SCN-Z	Save the Children Norway – Zimbabwe
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis
TIC	Teacher-in-Charge
UZ	University of Zimbabwe

## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

This report is based on outcome of two meetings that were conducted as follows:

- the Bikita QEP 8<sup>th</sup> Intervention held from the 10 – 14 September 2007 which was the last intervention of Phase I of the QEP pilot project. During this intervention, an evaluation was carried out using a participatory approach. The tools used were a written assignment given to participants to reflect on their experiences in this project, answering the following questions on the Bikita QEP programme:
  1. What do you believe to be the objectives of Bikita QEP programme?
  2. What are your concerns and issues of controversy?
  3. What do you see as the benefits accruing from the project on a professional basis?
  4. How do you want the value of this project to be assessed
- a SWOT analysis exercise, where the participants highlighted strengths, opportunities and weaknesses of, and threats to, the QEP project; and
- a three day project review meeting on the QEP curriculum, processes and participants' outputs by the QEP facilitators in Phase I.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

1. to determine the degree to which the major aim of the project, which is to assist participants to develop reflective skills in their practice, has been achieved
2. to determine whether action research skills and knowledge of doing action research have been adequately and satisfactorily acquired
3. to determine learning points and challenges of the project, and
4. to determine whether the project has life after Phase II

### **Methodology**

In the Bikita QEP 8<sup>th</sup> Intervention, the method used in the evaluation was participatory documentation. This method gave the participants an opportunity to record and reflect on their experiences in the project. This was done in the true spirit of the action research and qualitative research ethos that give value to the insiders' (emic) viewpoints, which give insights into the perceptions of the 'insiders' (participants). These were the people who were the target of the project, and therefore, their voices had to be heard. They came, participated; saw, heard, touched, felt, and therefore, they had something to tell.

In November and December 2007, the participants submitted their first draft reports on their individual action research reports. In January 2008, the QEP facilitators held a project review meeting to read and make sense of the etic perspective written responses of the participants to the participatory evaluation of September 2007 together with the action research write-ups of the participants. The write-ups gave insights into the degree to (which reflective and action skills have been acquired).

### **Summary of findings**

#### **Strengths and opportunities**

All the participants expressed the feelings and views that the project has positively and tremendously changed their way of thinking and attitudes towards their work and practices. In the body of this report, evidence of this finding is given in substantiated reflections of participants. The majority of the participants' write-ups have been competently compiled and reflected upon, using fairly clear and yet innovative action research formats. The participants

developed a practical oriented curriculum of the QEP project in Phase II and scale-up. The participants identified from among themselves potential resource persons to facilitate the learning of action research skills, knowledge and practice. The training in the next phase will be conducted in one of the teachers' colleges for lecturers and at school venues for teachers in Bikita District. This suggests that the project has a reasonable measure sustainability beyond Phase II scheduled to end in December 2009.

### **Weaknesses and threats**

Participants gave weaknesses and threats as follows:

1. inadequate financial and materials resources to compliment the current SCN support
2. the possible high turn-over of QEP trained staff as a result of the economic recession in the country and skilled personnel leaving the country for 'greener pastures'
3. promotion and transfers of QEP trained staff

In addition to the above points, a complete picture of Bikita QEP project can only be told after making follow-ups with QEP participants to their work stations to make further observations including talking to teachers and other stakeholders as well as interviewing learners over a period of time. Some participants, especially heads of schools have not sufficiently conceptualised the basic tenets of action research and reflective practice as they externalised problems they investigated in their action research reports.

### **Recommendations**

There are three main recommendations for the Bikita QEP stakeholders as regards Phase II of the project. These are:

1. There is need to further assist some participants whose conceptualisation of action research and reflective thinking and practices reflects a deficiency.
2. There is need for the Bikita QEP Phase I facilitators to support the new resource persons to support a new group of lecturers and teachers learn and practice action research and qualitative methods in their work in the period 2008 – 2009.
3. While some Bikita QEP participants bring out the voices of children (learners) they teach and talked to during their action research projects, a deliberate effort is required during Bikita QEP Phase II to capture the way the project has affected children taught by teachers trained in action research.

### **Why the Bikita Quality Education Project (QEP)?**

The Bikita pilot Quality Education Project (QEP) is part of a broader initiative in the Save the Children Norway (SCN) basic education programme. The long term objective of QEP is to investigate and contribute to achieving quality education in our schools. The pilot project seeks to improve children's opportunity for learning in school. This underlying thinking makes QEP revolve around identifying factors that may inhibit quality teaching and learning as well as exploring how to create a child-friendly school environment where children thrive and learn.

The SCN Senior Education Advisor, Dr Tove Nagel, launched the QEP in four countries where SCN is working with partners in basic education programmes. The four country programmes are Save the Children Norway-Ethiopia (October 2002), SCN-Zambia (April 2003), SCN-Mozambique (June 2004) and SCN-Zimbabwe (May 2005). In Zimbabwe, the QEP is run with three key stakeholders which are the University of Zimbabwe, Ministry of Education, Sport & Culture (Masvingo Provincial Education Office and Bikita District Education Office) and three primary teachers' colleges in Masvingo Province. The colleges are Morgenster, Bondolfi and Masvingo. The QEP in Zimbabwe has come to be called the 'Bikita QEP'. The choice of pilot project participants was designed to make a contribution to both pre-service and in-service teacher education systems for a system-wide effect and sustainability beyond the pilot.

The Quality Education Project (QEP) involves training of teachers, education officers and teacher educators in qualitative research methods and action research, in particular. The project seeks to promote reflection and inquisitiveness about the relationship between the participants' own teaching and pupils' learning. The idea is that participants identify problems related to children's learning, investigate them and seek own solutions to those problems.

The QEP is to address a concern of lack of learning by children raised by an evaluation of the SCN basic education thematic evaluation in 2000. The evaluation was carried out in a number of SCN basic education programmes and found similar concerns on lack of learning in the classrooms. SCN Country Programme basic education programmes had supported activities to increase access to education. The aspect of quality learning was not getting as much attention. Children were in school but there was little or no learning taking place. SACMEQ studies on educational achievement published on Zimbabwe (1998) had showed little learning in the primary schools. Only 56% reached the minimum desirable reading level. Hence, QEP was developed as a pilot to develop an approach to improve the quality of education by empowering teachers and lecturers to investigate, reflect upon and change their own practices in schools and colleges. The idea is that the reflection developed and change that will occur will improve the teaching and learning situation.

Although the pilot project was initiated by SCN, it is implemented in partnership with Ministries of Education in the pilot countries. It is designed to build and nurture the capacity of project participants to carry out action research and use qualitative research methods. Action research is carried out on the self and problems encountered in doing one's work. Self critical reflection is encouraged and developed. It is in this regard that QEP and action research seek to contribute to change in the practices of teachers and eventually bring about change in the teaching and learning in schools. The project falls into the 'teacher as researcher' tradition. It is inspired by several theoretical traditions such as thinking/reflection by Dewey (1933), Kemmis (1986); action / practice and reflection by Schon (1983), Liston and Zeichner (1993); and participatory inquiry / research by McTaggart (1997). The teacher researchers use the action research cycle to find solutions to their problems. They come to discover, uncover and acknowledge their

own roles and weaknesses in children's learning and take action for improvement inspired by own discovery.

**Purpose of the mid-term project review**

The Bikita QEP was designed to run for four years which coincide with the SCN strategic period 2006 – 2009. The project has two phases. However, Phase I lasted for 2 years and 8 months, May 2005 – 2007. A group of forty (40) educational practioners from the schools in Bikita, the three teachers' colleges in Masvingo Province and Education Officers in the MoESC Quality Assurance Division (QUAD) were trained in qualitative methods and action research. This group was called the Bikita QEP core group. This core group was trained to take part in Phase I to take action research to more lecturers in the three teachers' colleges and teachers in Bikita District Phase II of the pilot project, 2008 - 2009.

Thus, the overall objectives of Bikita QEP were to:

- Train a core group of school heads, cluster resource teachers, Education Officers and teacher educators in action research and qualitative research methods in Bikita District.
- Monitor and support action research activities of the core group in the same district to assist in identifying problems related to own and others' teaching/learning behaviour.

In this regard, the Bikita QEP mid-term project review sought to establish

- what progress the project was making towards its objectives (*etic* perspectives of the QEP facilitators)
- what strengths and weaknesses the Bikita QEP participants saw in project design and implementation that have a bearing on sustainability at end of pilot
- the extent to which action research skills and knowledge had been learnt and practiced by the project participants, and
- the personal reflections (*emic* perspectives) of the project participants as regards benefits accrued from the project on a professional and personal basis

### **Methodology used in the Bikita QEP project review**

The evaluation was done using a qualitative evaluation design. This was because the Quality Education Project (QEP) itself is qualitative, and therefore a qualitative methodology in its evaluation was deemed to be the most appropriate. In essence, the key actors in this mid-term evaluation were:

- the Bikita QEP participants (the core group of 38 educational practitioners who participated in Phase I)
- the Bikita QEP facilitators drawn from the University of Zimbabwe and SCN Zimbabwe, and
- a group of Bikita QEP pilot guest participants drawn from the other 6 districts in Masvingo Province who witnessed the launch of the pilot project in May 2005. They were introduced to the thinking and philosophy behind QEP but did not participate in the training seven (7) training interventions held between May 2005 and September 2007.

The evaluation was therefore, participatory. It involved QEP participants and a small group of 6 educational practitioners who had an idea of the project objectives and philosophy. The participatory evaluation activities over four days in September 2007 consisted of:

- individual participants reading their draft action research reports in plenary and getting feedback
- group work on a SWOT analysis of the project design and implementation
- group work on planning for the QEP scaling up in Bikita District and the three teachers' colleges (Phase II) in a cost-effective manner given a limited budget with themselves as co-facilitators of the Zimbabwe QEP Steering Group
- individual participants making and writing down personal reflections on Bikita QEP addressing four issues:
  - what they believed QEP objectives to be;
  - their concerns and issues of controversy;
  - the benefits accruing to themselves on a professional and personal basis; and
  - how they wanted the project to be assessed.

Bikita QEP participants presented their first draft of action research reports to the QEP facilitators in November 2007. The evaluation process included reading these reports and assessing the extent to which the participants learnt, grasped qualitative research and action research skills, knowledge and practice. This assessment was carried out in January 2008.

The thrust of the participatory evaluation was on developing deeper insights into the underlying assumptions of the project, its curriculum and implementation, the feelings and opinions of the participants who were to benefit from it. The overall interest was not on numbers who grasped action research skills and knowledge, carried out plausible action research activities and produced relevant reports. The intention was to use the process to illuminate issues around the project philosophy, design and implementation. In addition, the interest was to establish what Bikita QEP participants thought of the project

and the meanings they ascribe to the project as well as their reflections on the experiences they had in learning and applying action research in their work.

## **Section I: Review of the Bikita QEP participants' action research reports**

The Bikita QEP Phase I ran for two years and two school terms (May 2005 to December 2007). During that period a curriculum was put in place to train a group of teachers, school heads, Education Officers and college lecturers in action research and reflective practice. The focus was on improving the learning environment of primary school learners, education administration and management related to the same. The Bikita QEP participants included Cluster Resource Teachers (CRTs), heads of schools, Education Officers at district and provincial levels as well as teacher education college lecturers from Bondolfi, Masvingo and Morgenster Teachers' Colleges.

One of the ways to measure the success of the project in training teachers in action research, was an individual participant write-up or report of their implementation of action research and reflective practices. The project had four categories of participants. These were teachers, school heads, Education Officers and college lecturers. Participants in three of these categories produced very insightful and reflective reports, that is, the Education Officers, the college lecturers and the Cluster Resource Teachers. The school heads are still struggling to acquire these skills.

The major strengths observed from the reports were:

- the ability to show ownership of the problem and reflecting on it in practice
- innovative organization and presentation of reports
- indication that most participants could tell the difference between quantitative and qualitative research as demonstrated in the use of qualitative data collection and analysis tools i.e. observation, interview, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and document analysis
- a demonstration of ability to conceptualise and problematise classroom / lecture room and / or administration problems.

The major weaknesses observed were:

- a few of the participants failed to effectively appreciate the basic tenets of action and qualitative research e.g. some remained stuck in the quantitative approach, and as a result they failed to focus on 'self' in order to solve local problems experienced in their day to day practice
- to a large extent, the school heads failed to de-role unlike the E.O.s. As a result, they failed to climb down and reflect on self weaknesses or self problems; their action research project write-ups are on their subordinates and not themselves
- some of the participants failed to link up their problems to their objectives and action plans
- in some project reports, there is failure to focus on a specific problem
- in some cases (and for all school heads) there is need to go back to the drawing board and start identifying the problem and state it.

### **Reflection on learning action research**

The number of Bikita QEP participants who are still struggling is however very small compared to those who have satisfactorily acquired action research and reflective skills in the project. This is evident even in the research reports / write-ups in which most of the participants acknowledged in their conclusions and implications that the QEP had changed their practices and, for some, even in their daily lives.

At the end of every intervention, participants were asked to spend about 15 minutes to reflect upon their opinions and experiences in QEP in writing. Indications from these reflections are that

the QEP has changed their opinions, views, approaches and the quality of their practices in a substantive way.

However, our evaluation is based on what the participants said about their experiences and show in their action research project write-ups. It is crucial that the next level of Bikita QEP evaluation involves the primary school pupils in the project participating schools as well as student teachers from the three participating teachers colleges in Masvingo Province. This is vital to establish the degree of benefit from the QEP for the child.

### **Some comments on the write-ups**

The preliminaries in the project write-up are very important. It is here where the researcher builds or kills the project with an action research orientation. The problem needs to be clearly spelt out; it should be clearly stated. There should be a clear focus on the problem one is investigating. A problem suggests there is a grey area. It suggests there is a shortfall in something; a research problem suggests there is a gap in knowledge. In some of the weak reports, the topic and title are confused. It may be better to use title for the report as opposed to using topic when the problem is not clearly stated. In some cases there are too many issues raised for the investigation and the research question and sub-questions are left too broad and less focused.

In this report, it is necessary to return to an overview of the action research reports by school heads. This can be done by a look at how the group of school heads (Mapako, Mhembere and Mugadza) handled stating of their research problems, objectives and indicators of the identified problems. These 3 reports help to highlight why the group of school heads did not produce acceptable action research reports.

The major problem with their reports / write-ups is in the formulation of their problem focusing on the identification of the problem itself, the statement of the problem, objectives and indicators. There is no ownership of the problem by the researchers / participants. For example, some focus on their Deputy Heads or Teachers-in-Charge whom they accuse of lacking leadership qualities or of poor performance. The participants also go on to suggest how they planned to staff develop them (D/H or TIC) so that they learn acceptable leadership qualities to them or help them to perform their (D/H or TIC) duties better.

In the case of the report by Mhembere, the problem is stated as ‘How can I assist the deputy head at Makotore School to improve on his supervisory roles?’ The statement of the problem reads ‘The Deputy Head at Makotore Primary School perceives supervision as the duty of the head only and not part of his (D/H) tasks.’

In the case of Mugadza, her problem reads ‘The Teacher-in-Charge (TIC) at Mandindi Primary School does not perform her duties to the expected standard.’ Consequently, some of Mugadza’s objectives are:

1. to identify the causes of poor performance by the TIC, and
2. to motivate the TIC in the performance of her duties.

It can be inferred from these action research reports that the school heads think that they do not have a problem in the performance of their duties but that the others, i.e. their deputy heads and TICs respectively are failing them. This is precisely why we think that they should go back to the drawing board and start all over again. It is also our opinion that they cannot facilitate the training of others (the 2008 group of teachers and schools heads) in action research at this stage.

## Section II: Review of QEP by the participants

Section II of this report captures views of the participants when they worked in groups to make SWOT analysis of the Bikita QEP project. In groups the participants raised issues they saw around the strengths and weaknesses of; opportunities of, and threats to, the project design and implementation. They also wrote down as individuals what benefits they saw as accruing to themselves from participation in the project on professional and personal basis. In this regard, the participants verbalized and wrote down their emic perspectives on QEP, as 'insiders' to the project.

### Strengths and Opportunities

Participants noted a number of strengths of the QEP. They noted that the project involved fully qualified personnel. This is supported by the following recurring statements from the group of CRTs, heads of schools, Eos and lecturers as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Catchment area (project participating schools) has schools with qualified personnel. (CRTs)</li><li>○ Full compliment of qualified participants (school heads)</li><li>○ We have trained teachers who are stable in their schools (CRTs)</li></ul> |
|--|

Another view from participants was that the project involved major key stakeholders in the education system. These included teachers, school heads, Education Officers at district and provincial levels, teacher educators and education consultants from the University of Zimbabwe and abroad. The substantiating statements are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ The involvement of major key stakeholders in education (CRTs)</li><li>○ Positive support from schools / colleges (school heads)</li><li>○ Support from the stakeholders (CRTs)</li><li>○ Stakeholders from different work areas (CRTs)</li><li>○ Brought people from different job areas (lecturers)</li></ul> |
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There were also perceptions that QEP did not disrupt the normal teaching and learning activities. Table 3 statements substantiate this view.

Table 3

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Little interruption of the normal running of schools (CRTs)</li><li>○ The school setting was not disturbed (school heads)</li><li>○ The environment and facilities around made the project sustainable (school heads)</li><li>○ Conducive environment (CRTs)</li><li>○ Viable facilities that can accommodate various workshop programmes (CRTs)</li><li>○ The environment used was accessible and conducive (CRTs)</li></ul> |
|---|

There is also an impression given that the project had adequate human, financial and material resources. Table 4 contains the substantiating statements.

Table 4

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Proper project implementation due to availability of qualified personnel (CRTs)</li><li>○ Human, financial and material support made it sustainable (school heads)</li><li>○ We had renowned facilitators (CRTs)</li></ul> |
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- Use of highly qualified and effective facilitators (CRTs)
- Competent and highly qualified human resources (CRTs)
- Availability of knowledgeable facilitators and facilitation by renowned academics (lecturers)

### **Weaknesses and Threats**

In the SWOT exercise, participants highlighted certain weaknesses and threats to the QEP. Some of the aspects they highlighted included a feeling that the project is threatened by a high staff turnover. This is the case because some of the project participants were noted to be leaving their work stations because of transfers and / or promotions. Table 5 carries some of the substantiating statements.

Table 5

- High staff turnover due to a brain drain (CRTs)
- Mobility of teachers (CRTs)
- Trainers may move away to other areas (CRTs)
- Transfer of informants and change of researchers (CRTs)
- Dropouts from project (lecturers)
- Transfer of teachers from one school to another (CRTs)
- Attrition of participants as they move to greener pastures (CRTs)

There is a perception in participants that uncertainty of rewards and recognition after completing the project causes a threat to the project. Table 6 statements substantiate the opinion.

Table 6

- Uncertainty of rewards and recognition after completing the project in form of certificates (school heads)
- No recognition after exercise (CRTs)
- Lack of concrete recognition after ... carrying out and experiencing action research (CRTs)

Another threat and weakness as perceived by participants is that the negative economic environment may derail the project. Table 7 carries statements substantiating the perception.

Table 7

- The macro-economic environment and its effects (identified as a threat) (CRTs)
- Hyper-inflation (CRTs)
- Some serious events like hyper-inflation can hinder the project (lecturers)

Yet another perception of the participants is that although resources appear adequate and fairly satisfactory at that time, there was need to 'revamp' them for continued adequate resources for the success of the project. Table 8 captures those sentiments.

Table 8

- Human and financial resources e.g. for transport and equipment (CRTs)
- If we do not put enough resources in place in time for 2008 – 2009 phase, project may fail (school heads)
- Lack of financial back-up (CRTs)
- Insufficient / lack of enough resources (CRTs)

### **Personal reflections of the Bikita QEP participants (emic perspective)**

The participatory evaluation Phase One was based on four key questions raised by Dr B C Chisaka that the participants were required to answer which were:

1. *What do you believe to be the objectives of Bikita QEP Programme?*
2. *What are your concerns and issues of controversy?*
3. *What do you see as the benefits accruing from the project on a professional and personal basis?*
4. *How do you want the value of this project to be assessed?*

Participants were to reflect and write down their thoughts over a period of 30 minutes. However, for the purposes of this QEP project review and report, the third question was selected for analysis of the responses. The question read as follows:

*What do you see as the benefits accruing from the project on a professional and personal bias?*

The reason for selecting responses to this particular question is because it is trying to probe and elicit the inner feelings and thoughts of the individual participants (as is typical of the qualitative approach). This implies getting the invisible traits and qualities which are personalized in the individual participants i.e. the subjective person. The selected responses are from the following participants.

**Silence Nyisai Chikosha**

*I think it's good to say that I was totally transformed from a mere teacher to a reflective practitioner who always considers reasons for my actions in either way. Be it in planning lessons preparing media, delivering lessons, I now ask myself why I am doing it, what I am going to achieve, will there be learning in the learners, what am I going to change in the learners' behavior, etc. Personally I have gained self-esteem in interacting with other professionals, interacting with my pupils and even foreigners. I used not to be friendly to pupils and not socialize with many members in the society but this project has shown me the right direction to follow. I gained leadership qualities through interacting with heads, EOs and the DEO. ... My character has been changed to a new one different from the one I used to be before the launching of this project. I can now think critically, reflect and analyze every action I take even words I say.*

**Chipo Munyoro**

*From a personal point of view the benefits that accrue from the project are that I have developed to be a critical analyst and reflect on what ever I do in class with pupils, even socially and mirroring myself every time I perform a task or as I do teach in a class; a paradigm shift from the old practices. I now teach my pupils to be reflective of whatever they do as they learn and grow and also critically analyse their actions or thinking before they do an activity or action.*

**Jimmy Muzondi**

*From a personal point of view, the benefits that accrue from the project are that I have developed to be a critical analyst and reflect on what ever I do in class with pupils, even socially and mirroring myself every time I perform a task or as I do teach in a class; a paradigm shift from the old practices. I now teach my pupils to be reflective of whatever they do as they learn and grow and also critically analyse their actions or thinking before they do an activity or action.*

Vincent Chakanyuka

*On a professional basis I have been trained to be a reflective teacher who should continuously doubt my practices. I should employ reflective teaching methods basing on traveling and growing theories. I am now able to treat the innocent souls under my stewardship as people with individual characteristics who need individual attention. ... The material (reading) has helped me a lot in my personal studies in research.*

Gift Gadyadza

*The outstanding benefit accruing from this project is that of arming the classroom teacher with innovative means of solving his/her professional problems. The methods used are all user friendly, and ownership of problems becomes intrinsic. For the first time in my professional history, pupils will benefit directly. Comparing with what is in place, where most teachers work to please their heads, e.t.c., this project helps to solve pupils' learning problems. On a more personal note this project helped me change the way I do things at home. I now always stop to think how I am contributing to the solution of my home problems, which I used to put blame on my spouse or children.*

Kenias Janyure

*There are numerous benefits accruing from the QEP. Personally I have learnt to lay the blame on myself first when things go wrong in my social and family life. Such an approach has really proved a powerful tool in solving social and family problems through being self- critical, reflecting on self than simply shelving all the blame on other family members when confronted with problems.*

*As a class teacher, QEP has helped me to seriously reflect on my teaching practices. It has enabled me to identify problem areas in my teaching and correcting deformities in my instruction delivery. I have ceased to transfer all the blame on my pupils, the administration and parents when my pupils fail to perform. But, I have rather began to see myself as part of the problems and readily labour to identify the problem areas, understand them and seek the solutions myself. As a result my grade 3 class has since began to show improved performance as depicted by increased overall pass rate.*

Zvinavashe Takabvirakare

*Professionally*

- *I am growing from merely a consumer of knowledge to a producer of knowledge*
- *I am developing professional and social skills that are needed in daily social life of a person*
- *I am developing skills of identifying my own problems and try to find ways of solving my own problems for the benefit of both myself and the public.*

*Personal Benefits*

- *Improvement of own ways of interacting with wife and children, relatives, friends and public*
- *Professional growth*

Kainos Chagonda

*The project has made an impact to my professional career. I have been able to discover problems on my own as opposed to the previous where problems were prescribed by others. My cognitive set up was also challenged to think beyond the obvious. Through experimenting with pupils, what*

*I thought would come out during lessons could not happen hence this prompted me to try other methods. My research project will also be used by others.*

Esther Kanjanga

*... On the personal basis, I gained the ability to accept defeat from subordinates. I benefited that to gain the followers' confidence, I should de-role myself to their level. I have also benefited that I should be a leader not a boss. I also benefited that I should exercise reciprocal communication with subordinates. ...*

Constance Muzenda

*... Personally I have developed critical thinking and tolerance in my work through reflection on what I do ...*

### **Section III: Summary, tentative conclusions and recommendations**

#### **Summary**

The Bikita QEP Phase I ran for 2 years and 8 months. In this period a group of 40 educational practitioners were trained in qualitative research methods and carrying out action research on aspects considered problematic on their work. This group consisted of lecturers drawn from 3 primary teachers' colleges, Education Officers in the Ministry of Education whose key result areas included the promotion of quality education in schools, a sample of primary school heads and Cluster resource teachers in Bikita District. The key QEP facilitators were drawn from the Department of Teacher Education in the Faculty of Education, University of Zimbabwe. A total of 8 training interventions were held between May 2005 and September 2007. The 8<sup>th</sup> training intervention consisted of a participatory evaluation of QEP and planning for scaling-up in Bikita QEP Phase II in the period 2008 – 2009.

In November 2007, the Bikita QEP participants submitted individual action research reports which were read by the QEP facilitators and considered alongside the views of the participants expressed during the 8<sup>th</sup> training intervention. The Bikita QEP participants have, to a large extent, demonstrated acquiring and utilising skills and knowledge of action research to make a contribution towards their professional practices in teaching and learning as well as supervising educational practitioners.

#### **Tentative conclusions**

The Bikita QEP project review and reading of action research reports by the Bikita QEP participants lead to the following ethical perspectives on the part of QEP facilitators:

1. It is evident that the QEP project has transformed the participants not only to their personal benefit but even for the children, the profession and the society at large. Therefore, what comes out of this project is that although action research focuses on transformation of 'self', it has effect of transforming the relationship of the self with the others.
2. What came out of the personal reflections of the participants on QEP was an admission that 'reflective thinking' and 'reflective practice' were inspired by the introduction of QEP in their professional practice. The participants' reflections on the project and the experiences they went through bear testimony to this tentative conclusion.
3. The SWOT analysis by the QEP participants show that all key stakeholders were consulted and were participating in the project processes. They noted that the project was in the pre-service training of teachers as well as built into the structures of in-service education of teachers in the pilot district. The Better Schools Programme for Zimbabwe (BSPZ) was hosting the project. Teachers' colleges, with support of DTE in the University of Zimbabwe, are developing skills in action research in student teachers within the projects they work on and submit as part of their initial training. This factor has a bearing on sustainability after the life of the pilot QEP.
4. As Bikita QEP facilitators, it is our considered view that one is able to read, in all the participants' individual reflections, inner feelings of genuine appreciation of what the project gave them. The statements by Janyure, Chikosha and Kanjanga are some specific examples.

5. The QEP project seems to have succeeded in cultivating a culture of democracy in the participants' practices in their work and attitudes. Kanjanga wrote that she '*gained the ability to accept defeat from subordinates ... benefited that I should be a leader not a boss.*' Muzondi wrote that he '*developed to be a critical analyst and reflect on what ever I do in class with pupils, even socially and mirroring myself every time I perform a task or as I do teach in a class; a paradigm shift from the old practices.*' Muzenda wrote '*I have developed critical thinking and tolerance in my work through reflection on what I do.*'
6. Another effect of the project seems to be that its effects went beyond the work place in terms of change in behaviour as regards the family and social relations of the participants. This was definitely a spin off which was an unintended outcome. Another unintended outcome was the development of leadership skills in some participants e.g. Chikosha, Gadyadza and Janyure.
7. Finally, it was evident from the participants' reflections that the child became the centre of attention particularly for classroom teachers e.g. Chikosha, Munyoro and Muzondi. This is critical for quality education.

### **Recommendations**

At this stage of the Bikita QEP project in the current strategic period and focus on basic education and objective to make a contribution to quality education, there are three main recommendations for the QEP stakeholders as regards Phase II of the project. These are:

1. There is need to further assist some participants whose conceptualisation of action research and reflective thinking and practices reflect a deficiency. It was clear in the review of the action research reports that some Bikita QEP participants especially the school heads interpreted action research as investigating others' problems and not their own. They did not see themselves in why their subordinates failed to perform certain tasks. Some of them did not isolate specific problems to investigate.
2. There is need for the Bikita QEP Phase I facilitators to support the new resource persons to facilitate a new group of lecturers and teachers learn and practice action research and qualitative methods in the period 2008 – 2009. Bikita Phase II envisages making use of new resource persons to train a group of 45 lecturers and 150 teachers in the period 2008 – 2009. Some of the Bikita QEP participants were chosen by the colleagues to lead the training. However, these new resource persons need support and monitoring from the QEP facilitators.
3. While some Bikita QEP participants bring out the voices of children (learners) they teach and talked to during their action research projects, a deliberate effort is required during Bikita QEP Phase II to capture the way the project has affected children taught by teachers trained in action research. The overall intention of QEP is to make a contribution in the quality of education by influencing the teaching and learning of children in classrooms. Therefore, the project will benefit from collecting views of learners in the classrooms of the Bikita QEP teachers and college lecturers. The last two years of the pilot project could be used to interview the learners and hold Focus Group Discussions with them. The learners' voices are critical voices in assessing the overall impact of the Bikita QEP in making a contribution to achieving quality education.

## **References**

The Bikita QEP project review process benefited from a number of references:

1. Overall QEP design document by Dr Tove Nagel, SCN Senior Education Advisor, Oslo
2. Reports on the Bikita QEP Training Interventions 1 to 8 (from May 2005 to September 2007)
3. QEP Monitoring reports in between training interventions
4. Action research reports by the Bikita QEP participants.