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STAGE SETTING: AN EXPEDITION IN SEARCH OF EQUITY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The discrepancy between policy and practice is a recurring theme in education policy studies, especially in developed countries where implementation enjoys considerable attention in the literature (Malen & Knapp, 1997:146; Elmore, 1980:26). Developing countries, given high rates of poverty, inequality and financial constraints, can ill-afford the wasted resources that result from the poor implementation of government policies. There is, therefore, a greater burden on developing countries to ensure that policy implementation achieves its intended goals within education systems or, at the very least, to understand why noble goals are not achieved in practice.

In South Africa¹ much attention has been focused on policy formulation without indicating how to translate such policy into measurable outcomes. All too often policy-makers and politicians are focused on the desired outcomes of educational change but neglect the contextual factors that influence implementation (Rogan & Grayson, 2001:2). Porter (1980:75) argues that the people concerned with creating policy and enacting relevant legislation seldom look down the track to the implementation stage. It has also been observed that very few government initiatives affect mainstream practice in the schools (Joyce, Calhow & Hopkins, 2000:46) as a whole. These observations suggest that in many instances policy failure can be attributed to poor implementation or a lack of insight into policy processes. It could further be argued that reform initiatives in developing countries seem to pay little attention to the complexity of implementing policy under system-wide conditions of disadvantage and underdevelopment (Sayed & Jansen, 2001).

¹ My pursuit of this inquiry was fueled and sustained by Hughes' eye catching statement in the poetry book titled "New selected poems, 1957-1994", Paris, published by DU Tumps, quoted by Zegeye & Maxted (1994:23) in the book called "Our dreams deferred".

Despite scholarly consensus on the existence of a policy-practice gap in education reforms, there have been few attempts in developing countries to actually follow the implementation path travelled by a “policy” in order to explain exactly where, how and why this distancing occurs between ideals and outcomes.

This research, informed by concerns about the policy-practice rupture, traces the path followed by an “equity-driven” school funding policy in a developing country context in an attempt to explain where, how and with what effects the “breakdown” in policy implementation actually occurs in an education system.

In this chapter, I provide an orientation to the overall research plan.

1.2 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study takes place in the North West Province (NWP), which represents one of the nine provinces in the Republic of South Africa.² The case study traces the implementation of the new “National Norms and Standards for School Funding” policy and its subsequent effects on schools in the Mafikeng Education Region, situated in the capital city of the province, Mafikeng.

My goal is to determine the actual effects of policy, and compare and contrast such outcomes with the policy intentions as set out by policy-makers. The study therefore traces the course and effects of the new National Norms and Standards for School Funding policy (NNSSF) through the key levels of the education system; that is, from the National Department of Education (NDoE) down to the school level via the provincial and regional levels of government.

The intention is to examine how policy is implemented and understood from the stage of policy formulation to the level of education practice. The logic behind this approach is to

² South Africa as a unitary state is made up of nine autonomous provinces: 1. Eastern Cape. 2. Gauteng. 3. Limpopo. 4. Kwa-Zulu Natal. 5. Northern Cape. 6. Free State. 7. North West. 8. Western Cape, and 9. Mpumalanga.

determine the actual effects of the school funding policy against the legislative and policy intentions in the form of policy objectives and key performance indicators.

The design of this study required the selection of a cohort of departmental employees (participants) who were given the responsibility of implementing the NNSSF policy as well as key education stakeholders and policy analysts who were close to the policy. This means that the study paid special attention to the views of the participants in the implementation process with the main objective of determining how the policy was implemented and which factors explain the mismatch between policy intentions and policy outcomes. In essence, this research sets out to show the reasons why policy was not implemented as planned from the perspectives of the policy makers and users. From this articulation of the broad purpose of the study, two prominent research questions emerged:

- 1.3.1 How was the new school funding policy implemented within and through the different levels of the education system?
- 1.3.2 What were the effects of the National Norms and Standard for School Funding (NNSSF) policy on equity at school level?

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In developing states, the financing of education represents a major investment in a country's human resources. The need to create equal opportunities for all children to acquire education of the same quality is a central concern of the modern state. Indeed, the argument has been made elsewhere that "the educational success of poor children should be the business of the state, localities and schools" (Ross, 2001:6). The benefits of investing in disadvantaged populations substantially exceed the costs of not doing so. More importantly, there is a logical force in the argument that says "improving prospects for disadvantaged children is not an expense but an excellent investment, one that may be postponed only at much greater cost to society" (Davies & Ellison, 2000). In this connection, state intervention should not only be seen as necessary but also obligatory. For this reason, school finance equity is often regarded as a mechanism to effect educational reform, which is critical for educational development.

Ladd, Chalk and Hansen (1996:36) argue that an equitable system of education is one that offsets accidents of birth that would otherwise keep some children from having an opportunity to function fully in the economic and political life of the community. In this sense, education is seen as the great equalizer between the “haves” and “have-nots” in a society with diverse socio-economic communities.

In view of the above, the entrenchment of education as a basic right, the importance of adhering to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the necessity to safeguard democracy seem to have occasioned serious attention to public quality education worldwide. The quest to address “educational disadvantage” of marginalized children through the creation of equal educational opportunities appears to have energized states to develop appropriate distributive³ and redistributive⁴ policies.

Further policy attempts at advancing the right to basic education revealed themselves in various ways. For instance, at a World Conference in March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, 150 governments adopted a World Declaration on *Education For All* and a *Framework For Action. Commitment to the Education For All (EFA)* agenda by the community of nations should be seen as a renewed determination to improve opportunities among disadvantaged populations. But it is also important to realize that policy commitment is not the same as practical achievement.

Of critical importance is that *Education For All* is an important goal, which is guaranteed in the Constitutions of most countries and central to national development strategies (UNESCO, 2000:2). The declaration *Education For All* (EFA) is comprised of the following key principles: equity, redress, equality, and democracy (UNESCO, 2000:2, DoE, 1995a:46).

In pursuit of this broader education agenda, most of the developing countries realigned their national developmental priorities with EFA goals, including Malawi, Uganda, Namibia and Tanzania (UNESCO, 2000:16; DoE, 1995a). In 1994, South Africa followed suit by

³ Distributive policies-involve using funds to assist particular groups.

⁴ Redistributive policies-involve deliberate efforts by the government to shift the allocation of wealth, income or rights among broad classes or groups of the population such as “haves” to the “have-nots”. The aim is not equal treatment but equal possession.

entrenching some of the key principles like *equity* and *quality* in both the 1996 Constitution and the Education and Training Act of 1995a. South Africa's fundamental principles and approaches seem to provide a perfect fit with the objectives of the Education For All (EFA) as adopted by the community of nations at the Jomtien Conference in Thailand, 1990.

In South Africa, the historical pattern of educational financing under colonialism and apartheid has been characterized by severe racial and regional inequalities (Unterhalter, Wolpe & Botha, 1991:99; Donaldson, 2001:62). This unequal and separate funding of public education created huge disparities between white and black schools that defined political struggles for equal education among black liberation movements like the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). In this connection the democratic government was morally obliged to dismantle the system of unequal and unfair funding based on race and ethnicity.

New policies such as School Finance, Curriculum Excellence and Standardisation, particularly in developed countries like the United Kingdom and the United States of America cite principled issues such as equity, adequacy, excellence, quality and efficiency school financing (Jones, 2000:146; Welner, 2001:64) as the basis of their development. In the literature, school finance as well as learner achievement seem to be a cross-cutting theme in educational reforms. The same can be said about the importance of equal educational opportunities at school level, with the view to assisting historically disadvantaged groups.

South Africa, in response to the plight of the disadvantaged, the imperatives of globalisation, and the political necessity of societal transformation, embarked on an inclusive process of policy development. Indeed, since 1994 the Department of Education has been responsible for the rapid proliferation of new education policies (Sayed & Jansen, 2001:12). I view this as a period of "policy mushrooming" since most of the policies seemed unconnected and contradictory. For instance, the policy on post-provisioning argues for the reduction of educator numbers, while the new curriculum described as Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) implied more educators at school level.

The transformation agenda in South Africa produced a single National Department of Education (NDoE), a legislative framework in the form of the Education and Training Act of 1995 (ET, 1995), the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA 1996), the Further Education and Training Act of 1998 (FET), Curriculum 2005, the *National Norms and Standards for School Funding Policy* (NNSSF) of 1998, and related pieces of legislation such as the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) policy of 2001 and the Integrated Quality Management System Policy (IQMS) of 2003. The question is whether this impressive policy infrastructure translates downwards into educational practice – in this case, effective service delivery.

In pursuit of the constitutional principle of equity and the political necessity to transform education, the Department of Education (DoE) implemented a policy called the NNSSF. This happened immediately after the implementation of the new post-provisioning model. This funding policy (NNSSF) was viewed as a strategic mechanism to redress the gap between rich and poor schools, with the ultimate goal of providing *quality* education. It was also intended to act as a national instrument to ensure the equitable distribution of financial resources across the nine provinces in the country. At the heart of this funding policy is a strategy for funding that favours *needy* schools and previously disadvantaged children.

In this context, this research aims to trace the course and effects of this new policy on school funding at different levels of the education system with particular reference to the North-West Province (NW) of South Africa. In particular, the research focuses on the effects of equity-driven policies on the quality of education provided by “self-managing schools” which have been allocated extra functions to control their own finances and curriculum (DoE, 1998:14). These types of schools are called “Section 21 schools”. Allocations of functions to self-managing schools seems to be informed by the assumption that school based management is best placed to achieve equity and development.

This assumption of an increased capacity in the school as a result of the direct allocation of financial inputs, is the focus of this study. In other words, the increase in capacity (e.g., capacity to utilize funds, to diversify the curriculum) of the school is viewed as a medium-term outcome while increased student performance is a long-term outcome which lies beyond the scope of this inquiry. It can only be inferred based on the overall capacity of the school.

Despite bold attempts at transforming the education system through equity and quality oriented policies like the NNSSF, little progress seems to have been made. Indeed both the print and electronic media, as well as public debates, draw attention to the failure of resourcing policy and related policies like OBE in South Africa. It has even been argued that current educational policies accentuate inequalities along lines of class rather than race (Sayed & Carrim, 1999:150). Six years down the line, “*Inequality is still writ large in the education system, and too many families are on the receiving end of an unacceptably low standard of education delivery*” (Sayed & Jansen, 2001:25). Such observations seem to have caused despair among ordinary South Africans and necessitated governmental reviews of policies like the NNSSF and Curriculum 2005.

In the light of the above, a critical question is: “why do public policies so often not produce results as planned?” This question draws attention to the dynamics of both policy development and implementation, as well as the capacity of the state to implement such policies.

Regarding the appropriateness of education policies in South Africa, there seems to be agreement among politicians, policymakers and researchers. The Minister of Education, Kader Asmal states that:

I was told by everyone I met that we have created a set of policies and laws in education and training that are at least equal to the best in the World ...yet... the public believes that we have a crisis on our hands...the people are entitled to a better education service and they must have it (DoE, 1999a:14).

South Africa in fact has an impressive compendium of education policies that were widely acclaimed throughout the World (Sayed & Jansen, 2001:40). However, good policies do not automatically result in good results. Managerial capacity on the part of policy implementers and appropriate resources seem to be critical in policy implementation. But much still needs to be done to determine the host of factors associated with effective implementation.

Most of the recent local policy literature seems to locate policy *failure* and the associated crisis within the politics of policy implementation, since this type of literature appears to be very critical about the governments action. At face value, the potential of democratic policies

in advancing the transformation process seems obvious. On the other hand, most of South Africa's policies are the products of the search for consensus among contesting political parties since they emerged from the Government of National Unity (GNU) (Sayed & Jansen 2001:42). The GNU in 1994 placed a high premium on consensus and compromise in the policy-making process. Whether consensus and compromise positions short-changed disadvantaged communities is a point worthy of empirical inquiry.

Implementation challenges of the resourcing policy appear not only confined to the national level. In the North West Provincial Education Department (NWED), the picture looks bleaker when judged against policy intentions i.e., equitable distribution of state funding

For instance, since the implementation of the NNSSF policy, specific implementation challenges have been observed as follows:

An under-spending of R33 million earmarked for distribution; poor spending by schools in Quintile one to three; refusal by school principals to release reports to children who have not paid school fees; excessive fundraising; refusal to pay school fees and the failure by government to more schools forced teachers to erect temporary structures, provincial SADTU and School governing body (SGB) protest on poor implementation of the funding policy (NWED, 2001:16).

This disturbing trend places the implementation of the NNSSF under the spotlight of both media and scholarly inquiry. The matter seems to go beyond the question of financial adequacy. Given the financial constraints experienced by the government in general, and the NWED in particular, the under-spending of R33 million meant for the historically marginalized institutions raises questions about the actual translation of policy into practice, and the commitment and/or capacity of policy makers and implementers.

1.4 RATIONALE

At an academic level, the broader rationale for this study finds its inspiration and grounding in the widely observed discrepancy between a policy's stated aims and its actual effects (Malen & Knapp, 1997:30; Sayed & Jansen, 2001:78; Rein, 1983:16), and the failure to explain this distance in systemic terms. The specific and unique contribution of this research is to examine

how the funding policy “travels” through different levels of the education system and with what effects at the terminal point of delivery i.e., the school.

In the light of research on the complexity of policy implementation, and the difficulty of achieving equity, I became deeply interested in conducting this research not only for academic purposes but also for professional reasons.

Given the fact that at the time of starting this empirical study, I was already employed as one of the managers in the North West Provincial Education Department in charge of policy implementation and co-ordination⁵ (presently I am employed as a Senior Manager for Quality Assurance⁶), the task of pursuing academic studies in this area became even more relevant and appropriate. This was further strengthened by the practical experience I gained as a classroom teacher, secondary school principal and education advisor through in-service training. I therefore had the advantage of examining educational reforms from both the perspective of policy practitioners at the coalface of policy implementation and policy makers at the centre of policy formulation.

Furthermore, my role as the provincial policy co-ordinator allowed me to serve as the main link between the Provincial Education Office (PEO) and the Department of Education. In this regard I got involved in the implementation and co-ordination of various policies such as the Developmental Appraisal System (DAS) in 1998, the Admission of Learners policy of 1997, and the Rationalization and Redeployment (R&R) of Educators (post-provisioning model and contribution formulation of the SASA, 1996). These multiple positions offered special insight into the interface between policy and practice; such exposure and interest further fueled my interest in this inquiry.

Part of my motivation to engage in this scholarly study can be ascribed to my conscience which weighed up the costs of developing new policies at the legislative level against the costs of implementing such policies. The costs of reform intrigued me greatly.

⁵ The division or directorate of policy co-ordination in the North West Education Department, which I was heading was, among other things, responsible for the effective and efficient implementation of education policies and district co-ordination in the twelve education districts.

⁶ Quality Assurance in the North West Province (NWD) is made out of Systemic Evaluation (SE), Whole-School Evaluation (WSE) and Quality Management (QM) which has direct link with the schools and other sections of the department.

My concerns about the costs of policy first emerged during my role as a manager in the Ministry of Education. For example, policies such as DAS (1998), the Post Provisioning Model (PPM) of 1998, and the core duties and responsibilities of school-based educators were not only the products of fierce and protracted negotiations between the Department of Education and Educator Unions (EU), but were also financially costly. But of major concern to me is that the initial implementation at provincial level was not funded at all. As a result, provincial officials, especially Heads of Department (HODs) called them unfounded mandates (NWED, 1999:3). Surprisingly enough, such Heads have delegates representing them at the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC).

Perhaps the planning by policy-makers, on the one hand assuming a one-to-one correspondence between policy and practice, and the realities of the policy processing and implementation on the other hand, can be regarded as a contributory factor to the traditional view that regards policy formulation as being distinct and different from implementation. But such an approach required an investigation in order to pinpoint potential tensions between policy-making and implementation, and between policy and practice.

Another factor which really increased my interest in the pursuit of this inquiry into the critical importance of equity in a society in transition, was the adoption of educational decentralization in democratic states like the United Kingdom (1988 Education Act) and the United States of America (The Secondary Education Act of 1965) in the pursuit of the equitable distribution of scarce resources. What further increased my personal interest in attempts to unravel the complexity of policy implementation and the pursuit of equity, in particular, was the fact that the national and international literature placed a lot of emphasis on the policy process which is often seen as a continuum. This interest was further fuelled by empirical evidence that suggested the collapse of equity – or what Berne & Picus (1994:7) refer to as “the rise and fall of equity.”

In this connection, one of the major criticisms leveled against decentralization by several scholars and policy analysts is that “decentralization does not equal democracy. In fact, in many instances decentralization can be used to subvert a democratic agenda” (Odora-Hoppers,

2002:16). In the face of this evidence, critical questions such as the following attracted my attention:

- ◆ What are the implications of decentralizing key functions without ensuring capacity development at the implementation level? and
- ◆ Is equity in an environment of limited resources achievable?

Conventionally speaking, systems are about the accumulation of power or authority. This set of vexing questions, among others, further motivated me to pursue this research in the field of policy implementation and, in particular, the search for equity through policy reform.

The manner in which a single policy gets interpreted and understood by various policy makers, implementers, stakeholders, as well as beneficiaries at the different levels of the education system and the speed at which such policies lose attention of policy makers did not only intrigue me, but also got me more interested to search for more fundamental factors for the existence of such behaviours. A case in point was the way in which free education and the payment of school fees were understood by parents, school managers and parliamentarians. For example, in the North West Provincial Education Department (NWED) certain local councillors were officially warned by the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for the education portfolio “to refrain from discouraging parents from paying school fees in the name of free education” (NWED, 2001:3). This is an indication of the differences in the understanding and interpretation of policies. What contributes to this state of affairs required further investigation.

Another factor which led me to pursue this study in policy implementation is what I call the “difficulties” of getting the “truth” from the departmental officials at key levels of the education system; Marilyn (1998:46) calls this the logic of “confidence in reporting”. The search for truth was prompted by the manner in which officials report to one another or to the next level. My experience in interacting with all the levels of the education system i.e., from school to head office levels, was the disturbing trend of receiving distorted (e.g., inflated statistics) information about an incident: Principals of schools tend to give “head office” inflated figures when applying for additional teaching posts, head office officials in charge of the NNSF policy also gave the Department of Education (DoE) incorrect information or

statistics about the establishment of Section 21 schools in 2000. This deliberate act of reporting incorrect information to senior levels can be explained in official terms. This implies that the reporter gives the senior officer the type of information he/she wants thus creating a picture that things are running smoothly. In this regard, it became necessary for me to pursue this study in order to seek insight into what I call the politics of information.

Furthermore, the expectation of positive results immediately after the policy has been launched caused me to think deeply. This implies that policy beneficiaries like education stakeholders expect to see positive developments once a policy has been announced or allocated. For example in the NWED some parents refused to pay school fees, once the NNSSF policy became effective, citing fee exemption as reasons for non-payment and free education (NWED, 2000:01).

In the light of these interests, both personal and professional, it became important to engage in this academic multi-case study on policy implementation, especially equity-driven policies, in order to acquire insights into things like theories of change, implementation frameworks, the evolution of policy and appropriate approaches to policy implementation in multi-level organizations.

Finally, given the fact that South Africa has joined the global economy as well as being part of the sub-Saharan communities, it became a matter of necessity for me to take a critical look at how effectively this country has tackled issues of access and equity. This idea was prompted by an indication from the literature surveyed that it is easy to achieve, but very difficult if not impossible, to achieve equity and equality. Monsen (1998:2) argues that “*the goal of education for all is still far from being reached especially for the girl child.*” Implicit in this statement is the high dropout rate of children, especially girls, with pregnancy often cited as a contributory factor to the dropout rates. The trend now emerging is to look at possible factors, at the level of classrooms and schools, which might be contributory factors. The search for such factors prompted me to ask questions pertaining to the environment under which curriculum delivery is done and resourced. For example, are teachers conscious about the importance to adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate learners from different social background? Have teachers moved from a “chalk to talk” method of teaching to participatory

education methods? In line with the new philosophy of “ubuntu”, have teachers transformed themselves from instructors to facilitators of the learning?

Serious attempts to investigate these research questions, together with declining enrolments of learners at both primary and secondary schools, continues to heighten my interest not only in equity in general but equity in the classrooms in particular. This interest was further evoked by the decrease in the enrolment figures of learners in the North West Education Department Province. According to the 2003 statistics, the number of children in the schooling system from 1999 to 2003 dropped by about 60 000 learners (NWED, 2004:14). This continuous decline in learners’ enrolment obviously requires investigation (especially at school level) with the view to determine the actual causes of such high drop-out rates and the implications for funding policy.

Even if this inquiry is not intended to move into the classroom as unit of analysis, the effectiveness of the schools as a result of the resources deployed and used can still be inferred from progress made towards the achievement of equity. It is therefore important not to look at equity from the equitable distribution of resources only but to include other issues such as teacher development and the school environment (infrastructure) which can have telling effects on teaching and learning.

1.5 THE POLICY CONTEXT FOR NNSSF

The classification of schools as Section 21⁷ is intended to enhance equity at school level. These types of schools are called self-managing schools. Self-managing schools are the ones for which there has been sufficient and consistent devolution to the school level authority to make decisions related to the allocation of resources like finance (Caldwell & Spinks, 1998:24).

The above quotation is in line with the objective of this equity-driven policy, the NNSSF. Self-managing schools should be understood within the principle of educational accountability. It is important to view self-management of schools as an accountability mechanism necessary to regulate and ensure equity. Self-managing schools approaches call

⁷ Section 21 schools are the type of schools which have been allocated extra functions to control their own finances and extra curriculum functions. The devolvement of functions to schools allow them to become self-managing.

for local ownership of education and make professionals at the school site primarily accountable, based on the belief that better decisions will be made by those who are closest to the situation.

In January 1999, the Minister of Education released a new policy for funding public schools in South Africa. This policy, called the National Norms and Standard for School Funding (hence forth, NNSSF), described its principal purpose as “the re-distribution of public finance in ways that promote equity (ultimate goal quality education) in schools, and especially in those schools disadvantaged under apartheid” (DoE, 1998:16). Naturally, the announcement of the new policy raised expectations, especially among the poorest communities. This new NNSSF policy draws it’s mandate from the principles of equality and equity as entrenched in the Constitution and the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA, 1996). It is intended to identify schools according to their needs, distribute more funds to the needy ones, measure performance through the development of School Development Plan (SDP), and use performance indicators in order to ensure school improvement and development. The new policy further devolves financial delegation and authority to the School Governing Bodies (SGB) in order to create these self-managing schools.

The prescribed procedure discussed below could be seen as the “theory of action” behind attempts to ensure greater achievement of equity and quality at all schools which received special financial inputs from the state.

The NNSSF policy came into effect at the beginning of 1999 in some provinces and set out the *national norms and minimum standards* for school funding in terms of SASA 1996. The basic principle of the NNSSF policy is derived from the Constitutional guarantee of equality and recognition of the right to redress. Moreover, the South African Schools Act provides that “*The state must fund public schools from public revenue on an equitable basis in order to ensure the proper exercise of the rights of learners to education and the redress of past inequalities in educational provision*” (Section 34:1).

The NNSSF policy can be regarded as an equity instrument that “*aims at distributing the bulk of recurrent non-personnel expenditure to poorer schools*” (DoE, 1998:14) based on the

assumption that such an approach will lead to improved performance and the provision of quality education. Whether the targeting of the non-personnel budget as the source of funding can be sustainable is an interesting point.

Addressing redress and equity, the NNSSF policy acknowledges that existing funding provisions allow School Governing Bodies (SGBs) to improve the quality of education by raising funds for additional staff and facilities. In this regard the impact of additional funding like school fees indirectly “marketises” education provision and reduces the intervention of the state in ensuring equity.

According to the NNSSF (DoE, 1998:15), each provincial education department is required to produce a “resource targeting list” describing not only the physical conditions and facilities of the schools, but also, over-crowding of the school and the relative poverty of the community around the school. From the resource-targeting list, five categories of schools emerged from the poorest to the least poor schools. The provincial school budget allocation that emerged from the five quintiles favour the poorer segments of the population. Disadvantaged schools were to emerge as priority schools for targeting under the new funding policy. In order to get a better picture of the Constitution of the Resource Targeting list, refer to Table 1.1 below:

TABLE 1.1 RESOURCE TARGETING LIST FOR FINANCIAL ALLOCATION

School quintiles, from poorest to least poor	Expenditure allocation	Cumulative percentage of schools	Cumulative percentage of non-personnel and non-capital recurrent expenditure	Per learner expenditure indexed to average of 100
Poorest 20%	35% of the resources	20%	35%	175
Next 20%	25% of the resources	40%	60%	125
Next 20%	20% of the resources	60%	80%	100
Next 20%	15% of the resources	80%	95%	75
Least poor 20%	5% of the resources	100%	100%	25

Source: *The NNSSF Policy of 1998: Department of Education, Pretoria*

While broad funding policy is determined at national level, the NDoE has no authority to determine provincial allocation to education in terms of the 1996 Constitution. This means that there is currently no mechanism available to bring about greater equity *between* provinces. The constitutional inability of the National Education Ministry (NEM) to intervene in the provincial budget allocations raises key questions around the objectives and usefulness of the NNSSF especially in a unitary state like South Africa. The inter-provincial disparities are considerable (DoE, 2000:19). The role of the central government in ensuring equity, nationally and inter-provincially, in my view becomes indispensable. This point is based on emerging *prima facie* evidence which points to continued disparity. For instance, according to a comparative study done across the provinces, during the year 2000 the average per learner allocation for North West (the lowest per learner funding of all provinces) was R92-00 compared to R275-00 in the Northern Cape (DoE, 2000:15). There are clearly concerns that should be addressed with respect to the adequacy of existing policy instruments to deal with inequalities across provinces.

This broader political and constitutional context raises several questions that challenge the very goal of the NNSSF policy. Between the national and provincial education departments, who is accountable for equity? How will equity be ensured between the rich and poorer provinces? Is equity comparable to quality education? Will the equitable distribution of financial resources result in quality education?¹ In this context, systemic evaluation research done in the year 2001 shows that Gauteng and Western Cape Provinces are better resourced in terms of qualified teachers and other resources than other provinces (DoE, 2002:46). Perhaps their consistently better performance in Grade 12 examinations can be ascribed to their endowment in resources.

At the implementation level, the NNSSF Policy requires the devolution of key functions and responsibilities to the school level, in particular the SGB. These key functions comprise the following strategies: school-based management, self-management, financial delegation and accountability. In this scenario two types of schools exist, based on functions performed, namely Section 21 schools (receiving direct funds) and Section 20 schools (funds managed on their behalf by the province).

The direct allocation of funds to self-managing schools is based on the assumption that all School-Governing Bodies will be able to perform the following functions (capacity of the school is assumed in the NNSSF policy as prescribed):

- ◆ Manage the funds of the school,
- ◆ Improve and maintain the property of the school,
- ◆ Manage the curriculum of the school, and
- ◆ Raise additional funds for the school (*Government Gazette* No. 19347).

In order for schools to have direct access to funding, qualifications for Section 21 status for such schools are clearly prescribed in the policy. The following procedures constitute essential steps towards accessing funds and becoming Section 21 schools (Edusource, 2000:6):

- ◆ The School Governing Body (SGB) applies for Section 21 status in which it indicates whether it applies for individual functions or block functions;
- ◆ The application forms are then submitted to the Circuit Manager (CM) or School Development Officer, who in turn assesses the managerial and governance capacity of the school against prescribed conditions and criteria specified in Section 21 of the South African Schools Act, of 1996, and the formulated checklist;
- ◆ The application forms are then submitted to the National Norms and Standards policy group at Head-Office for final recommendation or rejection;
- ◆ The Chairperson of the Norms and Standards Committee forwards the recommended applications to the Head of Department who has the authority to grant or refuse Section 21 status;
- ◆ Schools are informed about the outcomes of the applications. The Act states that the granting of functions by the head of department may be unconditional or subject to certain conditions, like withdrawal in the event of poor performance;

- ◆ The decision whether a school has been granted functions or not, is conveyed in writing to the governing body concerned and reasons for the decision are furnished. If any person is dissatisfied with the Head of Department's decision not to grant Section 21 status, that person may appeal to the Member of the Executive Council (MEC); and
- ◆ Letters granting Section 21 status to schools usually indicate the following: functions allocated; amounts to be allocated (lump sum per learner); dates on which the allocation will be transferred to the school current account (cost centre). Payments or transfers to Section 21 schools are normally made in four equal portions or branches in January, April, July and October. However, this arrangement varies from province to province. In some cases the transfer of the next portion of the budget is dependent on the audited statements.

In addition to the stated functions, it is assumed that the self-managing schools (Section 21 status) will provide quality education (better student performance) through school developmental planning that is guided by the setting of the Performance Indicators. The school developmental planning is guided by a checklist. This means that in drawing up the school development plan (strategic plan) schools should carry out certain tasks in order to realize the set goals. This should include the vision and mission, priorities, strategic objectives and the integration of school development plan and budget. This study looked at the effects of equity driven policies on the schools' overall performance as a result of financial inputs using performance indicators in monitoring progress.

1.6 APPROACH TO THE STUDY

My point of departure for this inquiry is that the implementation of the NNSSF policy as an intervention mechanism for equity is in part a reaction to rational theory which emphasises objectivity, linearity as well as a top-down approach based on the intention to eliminate inequalities between the rich and poor. In that regard, I argue against complete reliance on the rational approach or the use of a single approach to policy implementation. My stand is strengthened by recent arguments which favour multiple approaches to educational reforms because of the imperatives of postmodern times and the belief that poor implementation can be

ascribed to a host of factors. In this connection, Vinjevold, Muller & Taylor (2003) for example, stress that the institutions of science (objectivity) and notions of “useful knowledge” have left us with little doubt that ideas of absolute certainty, objectivity and neutrality can no longer be supported. Implicit in their argument is the view that a comprehensive and critical approach to implementation is essential.

I have, therefore, adopted a systemic and coherent approach to estimating the school level effects of the new school funding policy on equity and how the NNSSF policy was actually implemented. The logic behind this stance is that a systemic approach to school reform is premised on the need to align and mediate support and accountability measures so as to effect school effectiveness.

The power behind the systemic approach is that it is totally different from the traditional approaches that insist on a clear distinction between accountability measures that often stress expert advice and standard setting from outside and support measures that place emphasis on internal culture, vision and teamwork. In brief, a close look at the systemic approach reveals a combination or realignment of school effectiveness and school improvement approaches to school reform. This is done in order to strengthen the investigative tools for the inquiry. In this study I have decided to adopt a flexible approach which allowed me to combine or use appropriate elements of school effectiveness, school improvement and school development to explain the course and effects of a new policy.

Perhaps this is also informed by the maxim that ‘one fixed approach to changing schools’ may not be successful. For this reason, a broad and comprehensive understanding of various factors that influence schools and policy implementation becomes essential; hence the importance in this inquiry of a systemic approach to educational change in general and school reform in particular.

Furthermore, in pursuit of the realization and non-realization of the intentions/goals of NNSSF policy through a systemic change approach to educational reform, I have decided to employ an interactionist framework to determine factors or behaviours which may in one way or the other contribute to either the match or mismatch between policy intentions and policy outcomes.

This is because policy seems to be changing or interpreted differently as it moves from one level to the other. Cockrell, McKendall, Hall and Placier (2000:259) confirm this point when they argue that

policies convey intentions, and policy-making cannot be understood without understanding actors' intentions. Policy is not a concrete text to be implemented but a transformation of intentions in which content, practices, and consequences are generated in the dynamics."

Implicit in this argument is the critical importance of paying attention to the dynamics that can either enhance policy intentions or not.

Therefore, in pursuit of the policy goals or intentions of the school finance policy, this trajectory study attempts to estimate the effects of the funding policy by investigating its travel course from the centre (policy-makers at national level) to the school system through both the provincial and regional levels. This is done by simplifying the NNSSF policy goals or intentions by looking at the following process indicators in the education system: Has the school developed the capacity to integrate the school development plan with the budget? Is the school able to effectively manage the planned budget? Have both the regions and provincial levels allocated adequate monies to the schools in accordance with the policy directives? What are the nett effects of the policy inputs on the teacher development and the approach to teaching disadvantaged learners?

Researchers in the United Kingdom, United States of America, the Netherlands and other states have examined the question of school effectiveness (Coleman & Bush, 1993:16; Mortimore, 1991:28; Morris & Everard, 1996:46), school improvement (Fullan, 1993, Reynolds, Hopkins & Stoll, 1999), and the reculturing of schools (Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan & Hopkins, 1998). While highlighting the different characteristics of each approach, common themes across these perspectives put emphasis on the factors required for sustainable change. Effective schools have strategies to develop the full potential of children at risk, deal with racial and ethnic bias, and redress learning and linguistic differences as well as special needs. These factors, among others, need to be addressed in order to increase the potential of schools to achieve equity.

Other aspects of the international literature consulted argue for a varied approach to matters of school reforms even if there are differences in emphasis; for example, school effectiveness puts emphasis on *equity* and value added results, school improvements focus on *process* and *planning* while restructuring advocates changing the *structures* of schools (Fink & Stoll, 1998:317). This trajectory study employs a combination of rational and non-rational approaches like reculturing to examine the policy effects against policy intent. This implies that I am avoiding the danger of sticking to a single approach to the transformation of the schools through this study of school finance policy.

It should be noted that this inquiry is not intended to use the test scores or examination results as indication of the success or failures of school-based finance policy. *Secondly*, this is not a perfect longitudinal study where the end-results or effects can be stated with complete confidence. *Thirdly*, the estimation of the school level effects that may emerge due to the equitable and optimum use of the limited resources are investigated through the employment of performance indicators and, in particular, effect indicators.

In addition to the study focus on policy intentions, which pre-suppose the deployment of inputs (resources) into the school system, logic suggests that this research also pays attention to how the resources are translated into expected results. This is done with the purpose of finding a match between what the NNSSF policy espoused and the practical outcomes. For example, are all key priorities and activities of the school development plan linked to the budget? Have the previously disadvantaged schools received and effectively utilized the allocated resources? Has the school made an effort to use materials that are accessible to all? Was there any effort to diversify the repertoire of teaching skills of teachers in order to empower them to effectively address the diverse needs of all children? Careful and balanced attention to these key indicators at the implementation level will give a view of the efficacy of the NNSSF policy in the selected case study schools.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This inquiry is based on a combination of qualitative interviews and a comparative case study design. It attempts to answer fundamental questions common to studies on policy

implementation, namely how, why and with what effects are policies implemented? Accordingly, this inquiry employed qualitative methodologies for data collection. Consistent with the naturalistic orientation of qualitative research, it became appropriate to adjust the design in order to accommodate new and unexpected information that emerged in the course of the data collection processes. For this reason, the adjustment of the inquiry plans and strategies resulted in the development of a questionnaire which was administered to all educators (participants) in the case study schools.

The new and unexpected data which led to the development of the questionnaire instrument was how the policy of NNSSF was communicated at school level by the school principals. In other words, a discrepancy emerged between the claims of the principal and the claims of his Senior Management Team (SMT). For instance, the principals claimed to have held workshops for teachers while teachers, on the other hand, said they were merely told about the policy by the principal in staff meetings. In order to address these contradictions in the course of data collection, the need for a questionnaire became clear. In sum, a questionnaire was used to triangulate data from multiple sources, like the staff at school level; to strengthen the key findings of the research; and to ensure that the results from one data source would help to inform and refine data from other sources.

To some extent, therefore, this inquiry adopted a combination of both qualitative and quantitative (albeit on a small scale) strategies. Scott and Usher (1996:59) maintain that the two research methodologies do not belong to separate research design paradigms; both can be sensibly used within a common investigation. Most importantly, the utility of both qualitative and quantitative strategies in data collection can ensure that research conclusions are more meaningful and fairly balanced.

The unique aspects of the two methodologies also served this study well because of their concurrent (although with differing degrees of use) use in this study. The qualitative focus, based on the use of a semi-structured interview strategy, helped in securing indepth data on the understandings of NNSSF policy and its implementation as seen through the eyes of principals, departmental officials, policy analysts and education stakeholders. In brief, the essence of the semi-structured interview was the construction of the context-rich

understandings of the new funding policy. This also means that the views of the participants were explored inductively. On the other hand, the quantitative focus of the study enabled the production of objective, quantifiable data alongside the data obtained through qualitative interviews.

Even if the intention of this inquiry was not to develop a new theory or test an existing one, it is my considered view that the themes, findings and conclusions drawn from this inquiry are well grounded in the data collected (i.e., they were not imposed) and offer broader theoretical insights for policy research.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The type of research I conducted includes a multicase study of five schools which were allocated specific functions to become Section 21 (self-managing) schools. Although an in-depth study of the five schools was done and certain key elements of the findings could be transferred to similar situations, the major limitation is that the findings from these qualitative case studies cannot be generalized without.

The other limitation of this inquiry relates to my role as a student (researcher) and a senior official in the Department of Education. Serious attempts were made to reduce the degree of subjectivity and bias through the use of questionnaires, document analyses, and peer debriefing. Nevertheless, personal subjectivity in the collection of data cannot be completely ruled out. In dealing with this potential limitation in the study, one has to accept that bias as a concept may cut across all types of research methodologies, but this does not necessarily mean subjectivity as a factor in the research should be allowed to persist. In this regard, everything must be done to minimize subjectivity throughout the key stages of data collection. In this inquiry, sufficient time was spent interacting with the respondents on their lived experiences so as to enhance the authenticity of the data obtained.

Given the fact that this is an exploratory study that deals with the course and the effects of school finance policy on equity, data was collected over a period of two years in the five case study schools. The schools were only granted autonomous status in 2001 i.e., a year after the

full introduction of the policy in all the schools. As a result, only short-term and medium term effects of the policy are captured here; long-term effects were therefore not reported in this qualitative study. This limited focus can further be justified by disruptions in the implementation of the NNSSF policy in the school system, sometimes due to the regular suspension of the education budget (NWED, 2001; 2002). This means that there are instances where data was collected in disruptive contexts.

Finally, the choice of five schools for in-depth case study for a single researcher can be cited as a limitation, given the importance of a prolonged stay at the sites of the implementation. This was further complicated by the distance between the selected schools and the volume of information collected at the other levels of the education system i.e., national, provincial and regional.

1.9 RESEARCH SETTING

A growing consensus exists among scholars, policymakers, policy analysts and education leaders that serious attention to contextual factors enhances the effective implementation of policy. In the light of this statement it has become necessary to look at the implementation of the NNSSF policy beyond the school level as a unit of analysis. In this inquiry, I focused on both the Central Region and the NWED. This approach is informed by the view that both the regional and provincial contexts have the immense potential of directly or indirectly affecting the school context under which policy implementation unfolds. Most importantly, despite the existence of South Africa as a unitary state, which depicts one nation, the reality is that it is comprised of nine autonomous provinces which are unique and each of which is at a different state of readiness and capacity to manage educational change.

The NWED is located in Mafikeng, the capital city of the province. North West Province has Botswana as its northern neighbour and is bordered elsewhere by the Northern Cape, Gauteng, Limpopo and the Free State provinces. It is one of the smaller provinces in terms of population but very vast in terms of open space. It is completely landlocked with strong functional links to Gauteng.

North West Province is home to 3,6 million people. Of the 3,6 million people, 65% live in the rural areas where the poverty rate is estimated at 57% and skills level is considered low. This is critical to bear in mind when one deals with contextual factors pertinent to the inquiry.

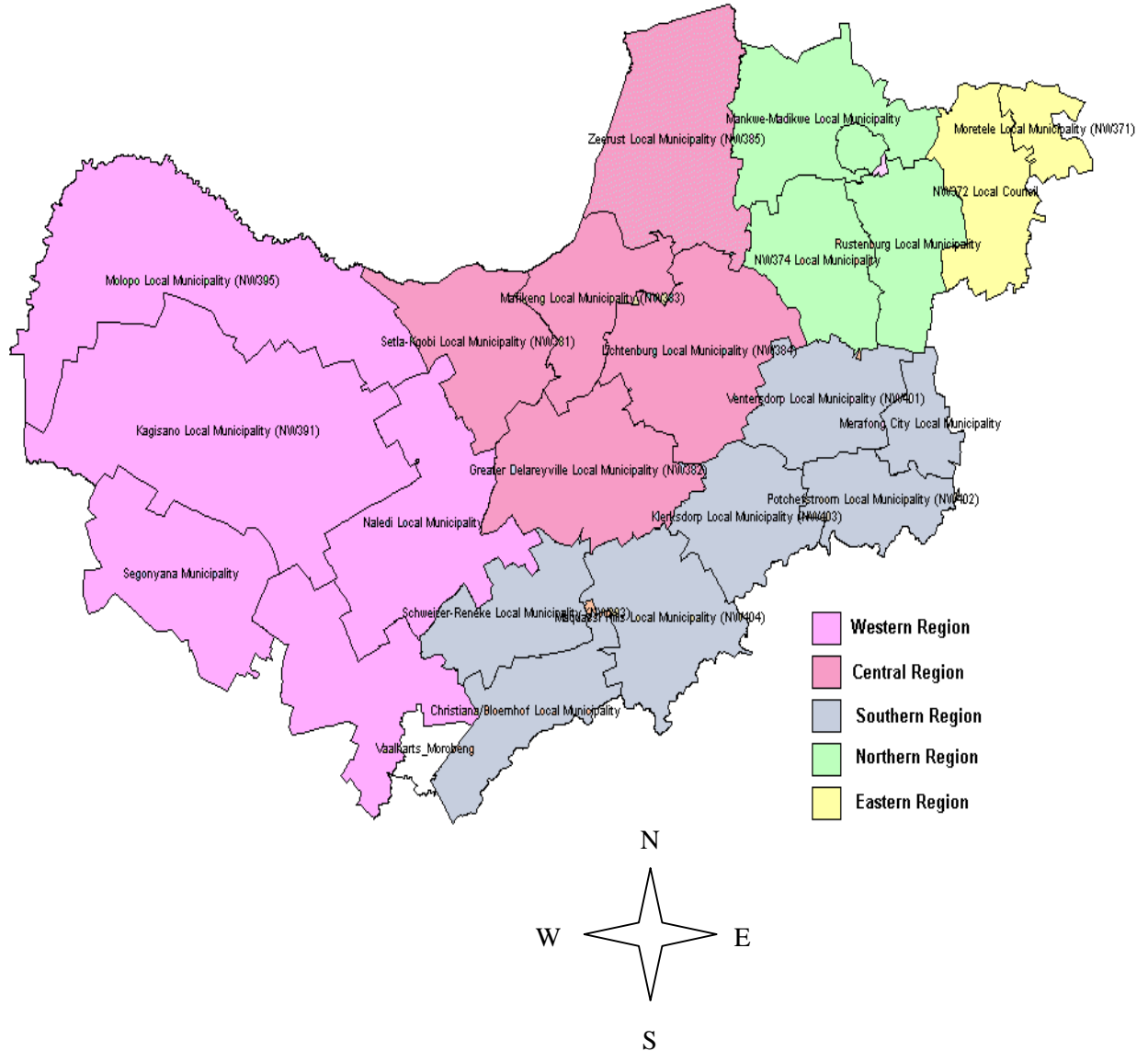
In terms of a new demarcation, the provincial government and the department of education is divided into five magisterial regions, namely: Bophirima, Bojanala West, Bojanala East, Southern and Central (see map3.1)⁸. In this connection, the five selected schools as illustrated in Figure 4.1 are located in the central region. The nomenclature “educational region” (synonymous with the district office) in the South African context is defined as an administrative and professional support unit which is hierarchically closer to schools (NWED, 2002(a)). However, conventionally speaking, an educational region is normally regarded as bigger than an educational district in terms of the number of children, schools and teachers.

What is worth mentioning in this study in particular is the fact that the new educational regions are the product of a long and protracted restructuring which started as early as 1997 (NWED, 2002:4). Given the time taken to complete the restructuring process, it is easy to infer that uncertainty and low morale among the affected parties cannot be ruled out. This is because the restructuring process of both public and private sectors is often associated with redeployment of employees or retrenchment. In this sense it has the potential to affect effective service delivery.

In this regard the “NWED” only began to implement the new organizational structure of the five educational regions as late as the year 2002 (NWED, 2003:14). It took the NWED five years to come up with the new organizational structure. In the light of this development it can easily be concluded that the new NNSSF policy was implemented within a transitional context which was dominated by uncertainty and confusion.

⁸ The following education regions constitute the provincial education departments: Central (Mafikeng, Lichtenburg, Atamelang, Zeerust), Bojanala East (Themba, Mabopane-Brits), Bojanala West (Rustenburg), Southern (Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp), Bophirima (Vryburg, Taung).

MAP 3.1 SHOWS THE MAP OF THE EDUCATIONAL REGIONS IN NORTH WEST PROVINCE



Of key importance is the fact that the North West Provincial Education Department has A high number of unqualified and under-qualified educators in the system. The 1998 statistics put this figure at 38% (NWED, 1999:46) of the teaching force. This includes teachers in pre-primary schools and independent schools.

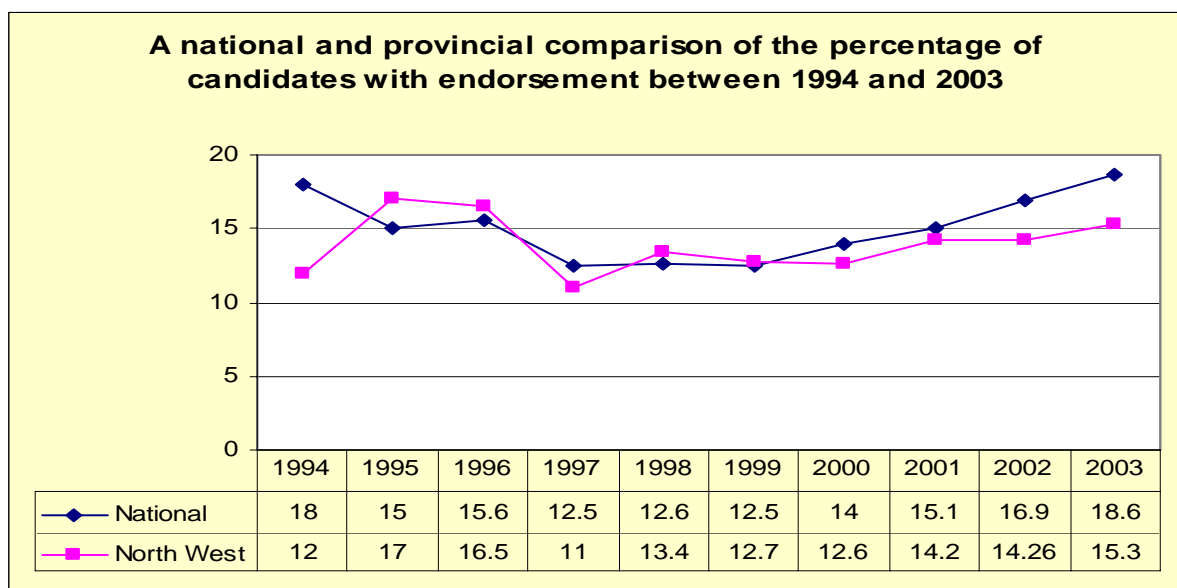
⁹The North West Provincial Education Department has a total of 2 365 schools, 32 468 educators and a total population of 891 957 learners (NWED, 2003:14). Of significant

⁹ The reconstructed statistics from the Department of Education on the Senior Certificate over the last ten years of democracy.

relevance to this inquiry is that this figure (891 957) is less by 60 014 learners from the 1999 learner enrolment which stood at 951 971. This decrease tells many potential stories.

The North West Provincial pass percentage for Grade 12 examinations 2002 and 2003 is ranked fifth and seventh (twice) highest respectively when compared to other provinces. This means that over the last two academic years (2002 and 2003) it only performed better than the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga. A lot can be deduced from this position. There has been a marginal improvement in 2003 when compared to the year 2002. The statistics for 2001 were 62,5% compared to 67,8% in 2002, this shows an increase of 5,3%. And in the year 2003 the results stood at 70,5% showing an increase of 2,7% for 2002 results, a key point in that the NWED always lags behind the national average in terms of performance.

GRAPH 3.1 A NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL COMPARISON OF GRADE 12 RESULTS



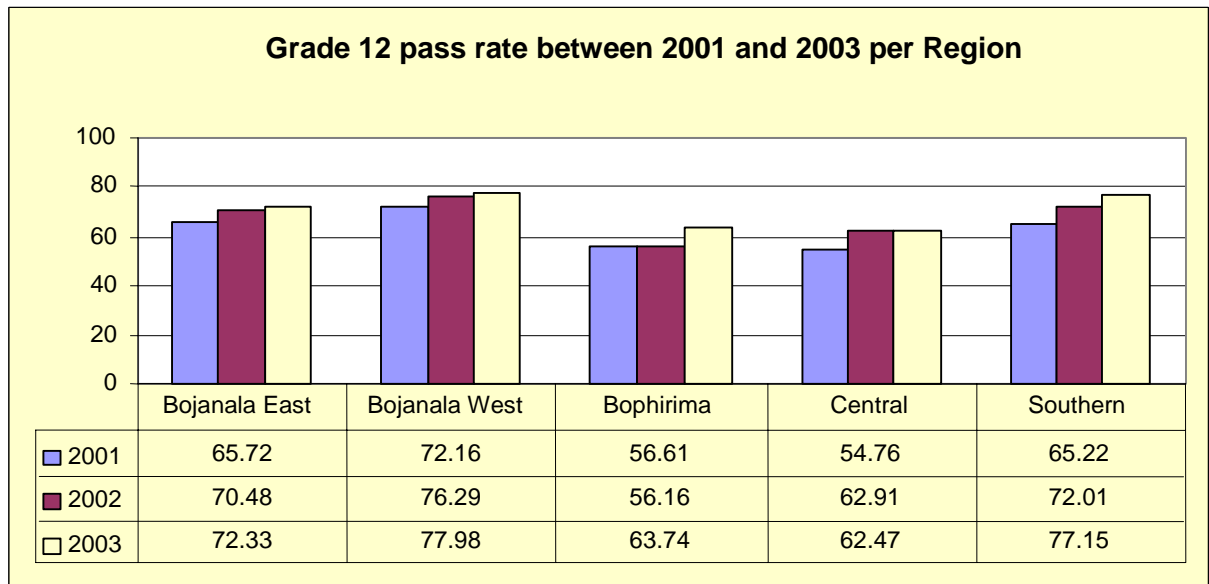
Graph 3.1 – Provincial pass percentages between 1994-2003

The statistics¹⁰ for 2001 and 2002 reflect that the Northern Cape had the highest pass percentage of 84,2% and 89,95% followed by the Western Cape and Gauteng. Of significant importance is that the **three** provinces mentioned did not inherit the homeland system in their new structures as compared to others. Although there have been marginal improvements in

¹⁰ Statistics from Department of Education Report on the Grade 12 Examination Results 28 December 2003 North West Province.

the Grade 12 examination results of the last three years, a national and provincial comparison of the percentage of the candidates with endorsement between 1994 and 2003 shows that the North West Education Department is below the national average at 14.2, 14.26 and 15.3 respectively (that in the last three years). This should be taken as a negative trend given the importance of matric endorsement to both tertiary institutions and employment sectors.

GRAPH 3.2 GRADE 12 PASS RATE BETWEEN 2001 AND 2003 PER REGION



1.10 THE CENTRAL REGION IN CONTEXT

The Central Regional Office is located at the corner of Carney and Nelson Mandela Drive about seven kilometres from Ga-rona building which houses both the Provincial Education Ministry and Education Head Office.

The Central Region, which surrounds the capital city of the North West Province, is divided into five area project offices (normally called educational districts) namely: SetlaKgobi, Delareyville, Lichtenburg, Zeerust and Mafikeng. The new educational region comprises the following towns: Mafikeng, Zeerust, Lichtenburg and Delareyville. The region is predominantly rural with some of the schools separated by a distance of 75km. The region has a total number of 583 schools for 5 140 educators.

Despite being favourably resourced in terms of the number of qualified educators, local and national libraries, Further Education and Training Colleges and the North-West University (Mafikeng and Potchefstroom campuses), the Grade 12 pass rate figures between 2001 and 2003 for the region stand at 62,47%. This is worse than the Bophirima region (63,74) which is very rural, vast and poorly resourced.

As far as training and development is concerned, the Central Region has been the beneficiary of numerous intervention training programmes. These include projects which target schools managers and regional officials, such as the Quality Learning Project, sponsored by the Joint Education Trust and the Danish government (DANIDA) (NWED, 2000:14).

1.11 ORGANISATION OF THE CHAPTERS

The chapters in this dissertation are organized as follows:

CHAPTER ONE: Setting the Stage, gives analytic and critical commentary on the discrepancy between policy and practice, purpose of the study, the research questions, and the rationale for doing the study. Furthermore, the approach to the study, the policy context, and limitations of the inquiry are presented.

CHAPTER TWO: Policy stumbles on reality: A critical examination of studies on policy implementation, attempts to offer responses to the two critical research questions by exploring both the international and national literature. This is mainly done to see how the NNSSF Policy was implemented and the effects of the implementation of the policy. In the process, gaps in the literature and in approaches to educational change were identified. Finally the use of various implementation strategies in both developed and developing countries were compared and contrasted.

CHAPTER THREE: The Conceptual Framework, examines in detail the complexity of policy implementation and how several attempts to use education policy to win equity gains failed to yield desirable results. The conceptual framework concerns itself with the aggregation of the collected data so as to respond adequately to the two critical questions guiding the research study. In this regard a socio-political conceptual framework and related propositions are

presented. Finally, the context for the research study is presented; this refers to the physical setting of the North West Province and the Central Region.

CHAPTER FOUR: Research Design: How policy travels from the centre to periphery. This chapter explains in detail how I went about selecting the key respondents, the development of the appropriate instruments, data generation and analysis. It concludes by paying special attention to concerns about validity and the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: Exploring the different understanding of the education policy among various implementers: generates a narrative analysis of data through the semi-structured interviews, school profiling, document analysis and questionnaires so as to respond to the research question: How was the new school funding policy implemented within and through the different levels of the education system?

CHAPTER SIX: Exploring the policy goals and effects: “Intentions & tensions”. In an approach similar to chapter five, chapter six employs the generated data to address the second research question “What were the effects of the school funding policy on equity at school level? This research question is responded to through statistical as well as narrative data.

CHAPTER SEVEN: The inter-play between policy and practice: theorising on implementation, gives a detailed account of the implications of this study for theory, policy, research and practice.

1.12 CHAPTER SYNTHESIS

Chapter one does the stage setting by anchoring this research study in two critical research questions. The two questions set the course of the study by seeking responses on how the NNSF policy was implemented and with what effects I now examine the validity of the research.

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