

EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE
AT LOCAL LEVEL

PROMOTING PARTICIPATION
IN PUBLIC LIFE THROUGH
SECONDARY EDUCATION:
EVIDENCE FROM HONDURAS

Erin Murphy-Graham

Introduction

Decentralization, or the transfer of authority from central to local government authorities, is ostensibly a way to improve the delivery of educational services through increased performance accountability (Gershberg & Jacobs, 1998; IADB, 2001; Noguera, 2002). An education system governed locally is intended to enable those with a vested interest in the affairs of schools, such as parents and the local community, to monitor and work to improve the conditions in their schools. Citizen participation is thus an integral component of local governance of education.

This article is not about local governance of education *per se*, but rather whether education can be used as a tool to foster citizen participation, particularly that of women. It examines how education might empower women, who are often excluded from local, regional and national governance, to participate in public life. It draws on data from a qualitative study conducted in Honduras on how the innovative Latin American secondary

Original language: English

Erin Murphy-Graham (United States)

Doctorate in International Education (Ed.D.), Harvard University, 2005. At the Graduate School of Education, University of California Berkeley, she is an adjunct assistant professor and teaches courses on gender and education and globalization and international education. She has worked and conducted research on secondary education and gender issues in Nicaragua, Honduras and Colombia. E-mail: emurphy@berkeley.edu

education programme, *Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial* (SAT), promotes women's empowerment. In this article, I adopt Kabeer's (1999) definition of women's empowerment as "a process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability" and "the essence of empowerment is to enhance women's capacity for self-determination" (1999, p. 435, 462). I argue that education can be a powerful tool to help encourage participation in public spaces, such as schools and local councils. My findings illustrate that women who participated in the SAT programme gained knowledge, self-confidence, the ability to speak in public and were more likely to participate in public life. In addition to acquiring academic knowledge, their perspectives and values changed. They valued community service and believed it was important for individuals to work towards the betterment of their villages. These attitudinal changes are a key first step in fostering citizen participation, which research suggests is required for effective local governance (IADB, 2001; Maclure, 1994).

Background

"Nobody, it seems, can oppose decentralization" (Gershberg & Jacobs, 1998). So begins Gershberg and Jacobs' study commissioned by the Inter-American Development Bank on lessons drawn from decentralization and recentralization efforts in the education and health sectors in Mexico and Nicaragua. According to this study, parties of widely different ideologies have proposed reforms calling for decentralization across Latin America. The education sector has not been immune to these calls, as the majority of countries in the region, including Mexico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Peru, Bolivia and Guatemala, have undertaken efforts to decentralize the administration of education.

While remaining somewhat popular, the educational decentralization has more recently been subject to scrutiny (Maclure, 1994; Ball, 1998; Gershberg & Jacobs, 1998; Bray, 1999). Ball (1998) posits that "increasing community input to education by more direct involvement in school decision making and pressure of market choice (p. 122)" is part of educational policies that emphasize the efficiency of markets. He argues that "educational market-places" protect middle-class concerns about maintaining social advantage and privilege (1998, p. 128). Rivarola and Fuller's (1999) study of school decentralization in Nicaragua found that some study participants viewed the *autonomia* (autonomy) efforts as part of a ministry effort to weaken teacher's rights and job security by injecting privatization into the education sector. Thus, for some scholars decentralization is not a genuine effort to improve schools, but rather one with strong ties to neo-liberal policies that emphasize deregulation, privatization and liberalization (Stromquist, 2002).

The main concern of many critics of decentralization is that injecting market forces into the education sector will exacerbate rather than ameliorate educational inequality (Ball, 1998; Bray, 1999; Stromquist, 2002). This may occur because citizens in poor and marginalized areas do not feel empowered to participate in local governance. Evidence from a review of 33 studies in 20 developing countries on school-based management suggests that more educated school council members play a more active role in decision-making on councils, while the poor and less educated members are less involved

(Khan, 2001). Furthermore, research from the United States suggests that that “where poverty is concentrated and poor people are socially isolated, the parents of the children who experience the greatest difficulty in school also tend to be the least involved” (Noguera, 2002, p. 3). This may be explained by feelings of powerlessness and a low sense of individual and collective efficacy (Lareau, 1989).

Moreover, evidence from developing countries suggests that women are even less likely to participate in public spaces than their male counterparts. An illustration of this pattern is the UNDPs Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) rankings, published each year in the Human Development Report. The GEM is a composite index measuring gender inequality by looking at three dimensions of empowerment: the involvement of women in the economy and decision-making, political participation and decision-making, and power over economic resources. The greater the gender disparity in participation, the lower the GEM (UNDP, 2003). Khan (2001) found that in countries with the lowest GEM scores, gender segregation lowers female participation in public spaces and restricts their interaction with males outside their households.

The findings from previous research on educational decentralization suggest that efforts to promote participation of *all* citizens in educational governance must accompany the transfer of authority from central to local authorities. Otherwise, educational decentralization will continue to “permit and perhaps encourage social inequalities” (Bray, 1999, p. 223). If local governance of education is intended to enable those with a vested interest in the affairs of schools to work towards their improvement, schools and other educational programmes must target those who traditionally do not participate in public life to become involved.

There is some indication that the creation of local governance structures will, over time, open up opportunities for groups previously excluded to become involved in community affairs (Khan, 2006). Providing equal educational opportunity to all citizens is another way to strengthen democratic structures (Villegas-Reimers, 2002). However, simply providing educational access is insufficient. As Maclure argues, “obstacles to decentralization and participation...are much the same as those which hinder the emergence of more democratic forms of governance. Unless more people attain greater control over their own personal destinies, educational reform will continue to miss the mark” (1994, p. 251).

Education is potentially a vehicle to enable individuals to attain greater control over their life outcomes. Unfortunately, the inadequate quality of many educational institutions across the globe, in both developing and industrialized countries, means that often education does not fulfil its potential in this regard. Villegas-Reimers asserted that, for education to challenge the economic, political, or social structures of a country, it should:

- provide students with the skills that allow them to participate actively in society;
- teach students how to read and write; to gather complex information, understand it, and participate in arguments and high-level decision-making processes;
- enable critical and independent thinking, and engagement in dialogue;
- imbue the values of democracy including responsibility, integrity, self-discipline, justice, freedom and human rights (among others).

Villegas-Reimers believes that the values of democracy should be explicitly taught in schools.

In this article, I present findings from a study of an innovative secondary education programme, SAT, that has received little scholarly attention despite its operation in Colombia for the past 25 years. More recently, SAT has spread to Central America,¹ where it reaches youth and adults who without it would have likely discontinued their studies after primary school. While by no means a panacea, my findings suggest that SAT has helped foster the goals that both Maclure and Villegas-Reimers believe are necessary for democratic citizenship and local participation, such as critical thinking, the development of values, and increased involvement in community groups. In the pages that follow I will first describe the SAT programme and the methodology used in this study. I then argue that SAT teaches students how to think critically and imagine a future that is better than the present. SAT also seems to foster in students a variety of personal virtues or values, such as respect for self and others. SAT students are able to practice democratic deliberation in the classroom, and some respondents reported that because of this they gained the self-confidence needed to participate in public spaces outside the classroom.

In addition to these positive findings, there are tensions and challenges. The first is that there is little data on the overall academic quality of the SAT programme in both Colombia and Honduras. Literacy and numeracy skills, as well as critical and independent thinking are prerequisites of meaningful civic participation, and yet we know very little about the programme's performance in these areas.² Furthermore, not all women seem to have benefited equally from the programme, particularly those who participated for 2 years or less. Finally, women's participation in community groups was often small-scale and not connected to other social institutions. I conclude by highlighting the implications of these findings for academics, policy-makers and practitioners interested in how to foster citizen participation through education.

The SAT programme

SAT is an innovative secondary education programme that provides educational access for youth and adults that live in rural areas of Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Colombia. It has won two prestigious prizes, one at the German Educational Expo and one from the Club of Budapest, which designated SAT as a leading international educational programme. Designed in Colombia in the early 1980s by the non-governmental organization *Fundación para la Enseñanza y Aplicación de las Ciencias* (FUNDAEC),³ the programme operates through an NGO/Ministry of Education partnership (see Table 1). It targets rural and marginalized populations, providing access to secondary education for youth and adults, particularly those who are ethnic minorities or from indigenous groups (Burns et al., 2004).

SAT is coeducational and spans grades 7–12. While the programme targets youth, students range between the ages of 13–45 (there have been cases where children and parents are in the same SAT group). SAT groups normally meet 5–6 times a week for four hours (during the school year). Along with a trained tutor, SAT students in each group who complete the programme study a set of roughly 70 interdisciplinary textbooks that divide the curriculum into five capability areas including technology (as relevant in rural areas), mathematics, science, language and communication, and community service. The tutor rarely lectures, and one pedagogical goal of SAT is learning through

TABLE 1. Summary of ideal SAT programme components and their characteristics (as described by Arbab & Correa, 2001)

SAT programme component	Characteristics/responsibilities of programme component
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range in age from 13 to adult and are both male and female • Have completed primary school and want to continue their studies at the secondary level • Decide (with tutor) on the schedule and venue where classes will take place. Once set, schedule implemented with formality and commitment • Participate in class discussions and practical activities • Complete requirements of each SAT textbook, including evaluations
Tutor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, comes from the same social and cultural background as the students • Preferably live in the community where they serve as the SAT tutor • Minimal educational background is the completion of traditional secondary school or SAT, however, it is preferable that he/she has a university degree • Receives pre- and in-service training from FUNDAEC and the implementing organization where he/she works • Masters the academic content of the SAT textbooks • Should strive to develop a teaching style that inspires service to others, and work towards becoming a responsible, creative and moral leader • Given the rural emphasis of the programme, ideally has a deep respect for rural peoples and an authentic interest in dignifying rural life and a sincere love for the village where he/she works
Textbooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FUNDAEC has developed over 70 textbooks, averaging 100 pages each. Each student has a personal copy. These can be supplemented with supplementary textbooks if the implementing organization so wishes. • No textbook corresponds to traditional subject matters. They are interdisciplinary • Each textbook is designed to help the student develop a set of related capabilities • The language of the textbooks directly dialogues with the students, leading the group through a participatory educational experience involving reading, discussing, asking questions, investigating, acting and reflecting on what is being learned

TABLE 1 Continued

SAT programme component	Characteristics/responsibilities of programme component
Implementing organization (NGOs in partnership with the Ministry of Education)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers an interdisciplinary team for coordination and support of the programme, including human, social, administrative and technical support (e.g., agronomists, subject-matter specialists, education professionals, etc.) • Hires and supervises coordinators who represent the implementing organization. Coordinators oversee training and evaluation and offer technical and other support to the tutors

dialogue and the exchange of ideas and experiences of the students. In SAT classrooms, the chairs are normally set up in a circle, and students often work in small groups. The general theme that links together the curriculum is promoting rural development, in other words, how this knowledge can be applied to better the lives of students and their communities. After finishing all of the SAT textbooks and practical activities, students receive the equivalent of a secondary school diploma.

A noteworthy feature of the SAT curriculum is the style in which it is written. The textbooks attempt to engage the student in a dialogue. As Arbab and Correa (2001) explain:

The main instrument of our pedagogy is an ongoing dialogue pursued by the student—with us [staff at FUNDAEC], with the tutor, with other students, and increasingly with the community and the institutions of society. Our textbooks are records of this dialogue; they are revised from time to time to reflect the way our discourse is advancing (p. 8).

The emphasis on dialogue reflects how FUNDAEC views the student. Arbab, Correa and de Valcarcel (1988) explain, “the student is not considered an empty container to be filled drop by drop but a mine of hidden talents and potential that need to be discovered, perfected, and directed toward the service of others” (p. 22). The view that learning is “educated” or drawn out of students rather than induced or given to students is also reflected in how FUNDAEC describes the role of the tutor and the overall method of teaching.

The use of the word “tutor” instead of teacher, and the overall title given to the programme, “Tutorial Learning System” emphasizes the idea of guiding a student in a learning process. Participation is encouraged not only in the classroom setting, but also through a series of service activities that students must complete in their communities. Table 1 summarizes the ideal key components of the SAT programme as characterized by FUNDAEC. These components include participants, the tutor, texts, and the implementing organization. The desired characteristics listed in the right column are not always carried out due to failure to respect programme implementation. The characteristics described serve as guidelines and goals for the programme.

In 1996, SAT was initiated in Honduras by a local NGO, the *Asociación Bayan*, in the far north-east coast. The programme faced many challenges, including tutor and student drop out, resistance by departmental education authorities, and insufficient academic preparation of students due to poor quality primary schools. Furthermore, SAT was initially implemented in two Honduran departments, Gracias a Dios and Colon, specifically in the region commonly known as the Mosquito Coast or La Mosquitia. Arguably the most marginalized and geographically remote region in Honduras, La Mosquitia is home to two ethnic groups (the Garifuna and the Miskito). While the programme has since expanded to seven Honduran Departments, the present study was conducted in four communities where SAT was first implemented in 1996.

Methodology

Data for this study were gathered between 2003 and 2004 in four Garifuna villages on the north coast of Honduras. Three (treatment) villages that had the SAT programme for 5 years or more were selected, along with one comparison village where women had once been in a SAT programme. In the SAT villages, 12 women were randomly selected (who ranged in age from 18 to 48) from the original student roster who had participated in the programme for between 2 and 6 years, so as to allow for internal comparisons within the SAT group of various levels of programme exposure. In the comparison village, the SAT programme was implemented in early 1996, but because the tutor was not reliable the programme was discontinued there after only three months. From this defunct SAT group, six women were randomly selected from an original roster of students. Women selected from this site served as an appropriate comparison group because they shared similar characteristics as those who participated in the programme (including prior education, socio-economic status and ethnicity) and they elected to participate in the SAT programme, although due to chance circumstances they were ultimately unable to do so. In other words, women in both the comparison and treatment groups were similarly motivated to study in the SAT programme. This feature of my sampling strategy helps address the important issue of selection bias.

I conducted over 120 interviews with this group of women, their relatives, spouses, tutors and programme coordinators. Thus, while my sampling strategy focused on women because I was interested in the concept of women's empowerment, I also interviewed their male partners (where applicable) and several male participants in the programme (including students, tutors and staff). I also conducted over 200 hours of observation in participants' homes. Data from these interviews and observations were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software programme AtlasTi. Initial findings were discussed with interviewees, as well as with other researchers and practitioners familiar with the context, to help address issues of interpretive validity and researcher bias. All quotations have been translated by the author. All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants.

There are several limitations of the design of this study. While my in-depth interviews generated rich data, the sample size of this study is quite small. Furthermore, because this

research was conducted by an outsider, it is possible that “researcher reactivity” might bias the findings (Maxwell, 1996). In other words, study participants might have been telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. Another potential validity threat, researcher bias, or that the researcher selects data that fit her existing theory or preconceptions and selects data that stands out to her, is also important to acknowledge. As Maxwell explains, it is “clearly impossible to deal with these problems by eliminating the researcher’s theories, preconceptions or values...” (1996, p. 91). Validity in qualitative research is the result of integrity (Hess cited in Maxwell, 1996, p. 91). I used a variety of strategies, such as member checks and sharing my data with an interpretive community, that will hopefully minimize these validity threats and ensure the integrity of this research.

Findings

While this research design does not allow for ironclad causal statements about the effects of the SAT programme, often women themselves attributed attitudinal and material changes in their lives directly to the programme. Three findings are central to the theme of education for participation: knowledge and self-confidence; values education; and learning and practicing participation in and outside of the classroom.

KNOWLEDGE, SELF-CONFIDENCE AND PUBLIC SPEAKING

Villegas-Reimers argues that a prerequisite of democratic citizenship is that individuals can read and write and think critically (2002). Several preliminary reports from both Honduras and Colombia find that the SAT programme is academically rigorous (Dubois Herrera, Vega & Pavón, 2001; Perfetti, Leal & Arango, 2001; Ramírez, 2003). Unfortunately, there is little data on the academic quality of SAT in Honduras. However, a cursory study commissioned by the Ministry of Education found that SAT students performed above average in national examinations in Spanish and mathematics. A SAT evaluation commissioned by the World Bank in Colombia made a brief reference to the academic quality of the programme. In it the authors mention that, “it is important to note that SAT students perform better [on Ministry of Education standardized tests] than other students from their municipalities. At the national level on three occasions rural students from the SAT programme have been among the best 50 *Bachilleres* (grade 12 graduates) in the country” (Ramírez, 2003, p. 36). More research is needed on the academic quality of the programme.

Until then, interview data from students who participated in the programme indicate that students are highly satisfied with the academic content. Some students struggled to articulate exactly what they learned during the course of their studies. In response to my questions about what they had learned a few students replied, “many, many things”. However, other students were able to provide concrete examples of new knowledge. For example, one woman explained how she learned accounting skills from one of the books that she now uses in a small market she runs out of her home. Elsewhere (Murphy-Graham, 2005), I describe these findings in detail, as well as how some students link

knowledge with their self-confidence. Several students explained that because they have learned something they feel proud and confident in their abilities. Some see their community in a different light. One of the tutors in the programme, Leonidas, described this process as follows:

Before, when they weren't in SAT, they thought that it wasn't possible to improve the quality of life here in rural communities...But SAT has made them see things differently. They have studied that they have potential. They can continue to grow. They can continue to learn.

A student, Inita, echoed Leonidas' observation. She described how SAT had given her a new level of awareness about the world around her. Her "mind is different".

The SAT programme has helped me with everything, you know, because it has opened my mind. Because before I didn't think about anything. I looked at the world as if, [it were] nothing. But now after SAT my mind is different.

Another student, Sonia, made a similar comment. She explained that as a result of SAT she is aware of things for the first time. Her comment also implies an expanded awareness or level of consciousness. Sonia said that, "My mind is not closed." These remarks of Sonia and Inita might reflect the emphasis of SAT on the development of critical thinking skills and understanding rather than rote learning.

Several women felt proud of the fact that they had studied. "Having studied makes me feel good," was a phrase I heard often in interviews. The pride or confidence that stems from having studied also is related to women's ability to speak in group settings. Several women commented that prior to SAT they were too shy to speak in public, or didn't feel capable of doing so. For example, Soraida explained that now she is a trained professional and so she is not afraid of sharing her thoughts with others, even in formal community gatherings.

I mean, I didn't do it [speak in public] because I was afraid and ashamed because I...because I hadn't studied. So now that I am a professional and trained, now I am not afraid of confronting any situation and expressing myself.

Leticia made a similar remark. She explained that through her participation in the SAT programme she has gained public speaking skills. "I have seen a great change in myself, because before I couldn't speak in public. Now I can give a presentation at the university. I couldn't do this before." Another student, Laura, explained that, "When I finished primary [school] I couldn't express my ideas but now I am much better. SAT really taught us how to speak."

Other students, particularly those who were in the programme for 2 years or less, remain hesitant about public speaking. For example, Aurelia recounted that she was recently at a meeting where she "asked a few questions," but she was afraid to speak in public and that she has "always been afraid." Another student who was in the programme for roughly 2 months explained that she "is afraid of speaking...I would like to participate more in campaigns, meetings, to not be afraid." A third student who was

in the programme for a year and a half explained that when she goes to meetings, she “just goes and sits, I look and listen...I am afraid to speak.” Thus, there is a wide range in study participants’ comfort levels with public speaking.

In addition to academic knowledge and confidence that students gained, many described feeling proud of their new values and manners. They explained that they learned how to behave (*comportarse*) in the programme, which reinforced their self-confidence. Their explanations echo Villegas-Reimers’ argument that to educate for democracy schools must explicitly teach the values of respect, tolerance, self-discipline and responsibility.

DEMOCRATIC VALUES

The SAT curriculum focuses on both academic and personal capabilities. Many of the women interviewed explained that their experience in SAT taught them how to behave as a community leader or professional. As Teodora explained, it helped her “not to have problems with other people.” Another student, Irina, explained that:

I am respectful, I am not like I was before when nothing mattered to me. After I started studying I changed my attitude with people. I like to talk with them because I like it when others understand me and answer me with kindness.

Irina explained that before she started the programme she would get in arguments with her friends, especially if they criticized her in any way. These arguments would take place in public. She explained that they would “make fools of” themselves, and that she doesn’t do this anymore because it would embarrass her now. “It would make me ashamed. A person who has studied can change her attitude, because now this [behaviour] on the street, now I don’t do it.” Irina is no longer ashamed of her behaviour, and this is linked to improved self-confidence.

One of the specific ways that students mentioned they have changed in terms of their values is that they now greet other community members. When they cross paths with another individual, regardless of their age, they look at them and say “good morning”, or “good afternoon”. This is a way that they can demonstrate their respect for other community members. As Juanita explained:

I learned that one should greet older people, respect them and everything, even young people. Some older people say that you don’t have to greet someone younger than you...but you have to greet the younger person just like you greet the older person.

Renata, another SAT student, echoed Juanita’s comment. She explained that one example of good conduct was, “in the morning you have to greet people and be considerate to all of the people you encounter.” The simple act of greeting fellow community members, according to Juanita and Renata, demonstrates respect and concern for others.

One of the plausible explanations for students’ emphasis on respect for others is that the SAT curriculum stresses and frequently reinforces the notion of unity. This was the

subject of a study conducted by Honeyman (2004), who interviewed and administered surveys to 96 SAT students and a comparison group of 88 youth in a traditional Honduran secondary school, a *centro basico* (CB). Honeyman's study describes the impact of SAT on students' concern for the well-being of others in their communities, a concept she describes as social responsibility. She found that 45% of SAT students sampled believed that strengthening the unity of their community was very important, compared with 28% of CB students. Likewise, she found that 58% of SAT students thought helping with the development of their community was very important, compared with only 19% of CB students. SAT students she interviewed explained that:

- This is an education (SAT) that helps us to develop very differently from traditional schools, it helps us to have social values like serving the community, like being united.
- In my community I only learned to be divided, disunited, but in SAT they have taught me to be more truthful and more responsible with the community, with my whole family and with myself.
- Before nothing about my community was important to me. Now that I am studying in SAT I am interested in the lives of others...My opinion changed because now I know that we should be united.

While further research is needed to examine the extent to which SAT fosters social responsibility in its students, Honeyman's findings suggest a potential linkage between a student's sense of their responsibility to serve their community and their participation in community meetings or organizations, such as the village council. This leads to the third emergent theme: learning to participate in and outside of the classroom.

LEARNING TO PARTICIPATE

Along with their new knowledge, confidence, ability to speak in public, and values, some interviewees mentioned that they are involved in community organizations for the first time. For example, Teodora was on the village council in 1998, 2000 and 2002. She did not belong to the council prior to 1998. I asked her why, and she explained that she began to participate on the council because of her experience in SAT.

It was when I started with SAT. I can say that it helped familiarize me with other people and participate. To not be ashamed to be in meetings... I can say that SAT shaped me (*me formó*.) Before I was always ashamed. People would say to me, 'lets go to meetings.' I would say 'no way.' After being in the programme, we used to go to meet with other students in [neighbouring villages] so I got better at this...

As Teodora described, in SAT students are forced to speak in front of others in the classroom and during "*encuentros*" (encounters) with other SAT groups in the region. Teodora explained that before SAT she was "ashamed, or better said, afraid, [to speak in public] but not now." Another student, Renata, recounted an experience she had in SAT that made her more willing to participate in public groups, although she remains rather shy. During part of her studies she attended a meeting in another village where she was asked to present herself and say a few words. "When they called on me to speak, I got up

and went to speak. I had never done this before. I thought that I wouldn't be able to speak, that I would be afraid, but I was fine." Another student, Sonia is now the secretary of the single mother's group, the treasurer of her church group, and she frequently participates in community meetings. Prior to her participation in SAT, she "didn't even get together with other people. I only went to my mother's." Another student explained that she feels good about herself because she is able to participate in activities. "I feel better for the simple reason that I participate in more things." She provided a concrete example: "A little while ago they came from another Department [to give a workshop], and I went with some friends, always learning new things."

One student, Lina, might be considered an "outlier" in this domain since her level of participation in community organizations was not typical. Lina was in her early 20s and was studying to be a social worker at the National University in Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital. Lina was always active in her community, but during her years in SAT became even more engaged. She was the president and treasurer of the Catholic youth organization *Pastoral Social* in her region. She was also selected as a student leader by *Pastoral Social* Honduras and was sent as a youth representative to the Jubilee 2000 celebration at the Vatican in Rome. She explains that she was selected because, "I was active in groups and they elected me as coordinator." She remains active in the organization, attending regular meetings in Tegucigalpa.

The limitations of this study do not allow me to isolate an impact of SAT on women's participation in community organizations. Lina explained that she had been active in her community since she was a small child. Furthermore, many of the women in the comparison group (four out of six) are currently involved in community groups, despite their lack of participation in SAT. Thus, it is possible that these women would have been active community members even without the SAT intervention.

However, some women do claim that they were active in the community for the first time as a result of their involvement in SAT. There are several interconnected and mutually reinforcing reasons why women might be inspired to become involved in public life through their studies. First, they feel more confident and capable because they have studied. Second, they learn values such as respect and unity, which provide motivation for them to contribute towards community improvement.

A third reason why women might participate in public life is the emphasis given to community service in the SAT curriculum. Recall that one of the five curriculum areas is community service. The SAT textbooks attempt to instill a sense of "dialogue" between the student and his/her community by requiring that the student visit community members and take part in community activities. For example, in one of the first lessons students are required to go and speak with at least five parents and ask if their children have had intestinal parasites in the past 6 months. Investigations such as this are part of the student learning to interact with the community, to identify possible problems, and later, propose solutions for community improvement.

In the villages where this research was conducted, SAT groups initiated several community service projects. For example, in the late 1990s, a pest destroyed many of the native palm trees along the north coast. A SAT group started a nursery to grow a different variety of palm tree, and they donated these to local families to plant. Other

groups started community medicine chests, tutoring programmes in the primary school, a single mothers' group, and an environmental awareness campaign. By practising participation in the SAT programme, students got a taste of what it is like to contribute to community development. These service activities provide a necessary foundation upon which future participation in both formal and informal social structures could be built.

Much of the participation of women in this study could be classified as informal. While four of the 12 women of the sample were involved in organized formal groups (*Pastoral Social* and the village council), several women were involved with a mother's group that did not have explicit goals. Another woman was involved in a bee-keeping project that had not yet started. Thus, while there are some indications that women became more involved in their community, it is not clear that their participation in informal social structures would lead to involvement in more formal organizations, such as school councils or local governing bodies.

Implications and conclusion

Studies on decentralization efforts in Nicaragua, Bolivia, Peru, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and El Salvador highlight the "limits to citizen participation that the central government can impose on supposedly local programmes where citizens are told that they have new decision-making power..." (IADB, 2001, p. 9). Factors that limit citizen participation include the low level of education, particularly in rural communities, and discrimination based on sex and/or ethnicity (IADB, 2001). As a case study on decentralization in Bolivia explained, "women's participation in local life is still very limited, and practically nonexistent in the case of the rural municipalities" (IADB, 2001).

The findings from the present study suggest that innovative education can be used as a tool to encourage women to become involved in public life. A case study on decentralization efforts in Guatemala reached similar conclusions. Since 1997 a Guatemalan NGO, Talita Kumi, has "provided education to the most far-flung communities" using the SAT curriculum (IADB, 2001). The case study finds that:

The Talita Kumi programme shows that community education and training are essential for participative development. In this respect, development programmes should include education and training methods appropriate to the specific circumstances and needs of the community...[Talita Kumi's] education and training programme plays a fundamental role in integrating the participation of traditionally excluded groups. Overcoming obstacles stemming from the traditional culture, the programme works with these groups to educate and train them, not only in income-related activities, but also in skills such as public speaking and management, etc., that will help to change the views that presently exclude them (IADB, 2001, p. 39).

Currently, most schools do not encourage student participation nor do they teach students how to become active citizens in their communities. While more research is needed, the findings of this study suggest that programmes like SAT have the potential to empower women and adolescent girls to become active community members. In the words of Maclure, it may enable individuals to "attain greater control over their own

personal destinies,” which he argues is essential if educational reforms are to work (1994, p. 251).

It is unlikely that all education programmes will have similar effects on citizen participation. The findings of this study suggest that there may be several features of education that could promote citizen participation for both men and women. These include:

- an explicit focus on gender equity in the curriculum that challenges dominant notions of masculinity and femininity;
- encouraging dialogue and debate among students;
- giving students the opportunity to practice speaking in public through events that take place outside the classroom;
- making community service an integral part of the curriculum. Through engaging in service activities, students might see the role that they can play as leaders in their community and active agents in its betterment.

Related to this last point is another feature of education programmes that might help promote citizen participation. If the programme obliges students to interact with community members in outreach activities, community members will inevitably participate in students' education. This curricular feature expands current understandings of citizen participation in education. Notions of participation in schools are often limited to attending planning meetings, cleaning up the school courtyard, preparing and serving food, or providing support in the classroom. Not all parents and community members feel comfortable or capable of participating in activities such as these. In the study villages, for example, few parents had attended secondary school themselves and so they may have felt uncomfortable participating in “school” activities.

The findings of this study highlight that educational scholars, planners and activists should think creatively about how to foster community participation in education. One initiative to try is to allow parents and other community members to participate informally in students' education so that they feel more comfortable in formal settings, such as meetings. For example, in SAT, students have agricultural experiments where they plant and cultivate a variety of crops. Parents often lend plots of land and technical assistance for these experiments. This gets parents involved in a domain where they feel they have something meaningful to contribute. This type of participation might make them more comfortable coming to parent or school council meetings in the future.

Another relatively straightforward strategy to help promote participation is to encourage students to share what they are learning with siblings, parents and other relatives who live in their household. There were several accounts of this taking place in the study villages. For example, one spouse of a student explained that his wife “taught him everything she learned.” They often read the textbooks together during the evenings. One aspect of the programme that facilitated this sharing is that students receive individual copies of their textbooks.⁴ These texts were, in many cases, the only literacy materials in the home. Few public primary and secondary school programmes in Central America provide students with individual copies of texts, often because they are considered too expensive. What needs to be accounted for in cost-effectiveness equations is

the possibility that these texts will benefit both the students and potentially their entire households. If all household members learn through educational materials such as textbooks, it is possible that they will also feel more capable of participating in public life.

In the short term, the international education community would benefit from future studies that investigate the features of education that contribute to citizen participation. We know very little about the overall quality and outcomes of secondary school programmes in Central America such as SAT, as no comprehensive evaluations exist. The next decade will undoubtedly see an expansion in secondary school provision, and it is important to understand the merits and shortfalls of different programmes. It is essential that these evaluations look at a wide range of outcomes including academic performance, preparation for democratic citizenship, level of parental engagement, students' values and attitudes, and what happens to students when they complete their studies. Furthermore, local NGOs such as *Asociación Bayan* and FUNDAEC play a key role in educational provision and expansion in many developing countries, yet more studies are needed to investigate how NGO involvement in education might improve and/or hinder access and quality.

The expansion of secondary education programmes throughout Latin America provides an exciting opportunity to learn more about how education can foster many complementary development goals, including the empowerment of women and other marginalized groups. Efforts to enhance local control of education require the participation of the local community. Otherwise, decentralization will likely exacerbate the educational inequality it seeks to redress. Expanding educational programmes that contribute to citizen participation offers a glimmer of hope that, over time, the majority rather than a minority of citizens can share power and responsibility to improve education for all students.

Notes

1. Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua all have SAT groups. Besides Colombia, Honduras has the largest number of students enrolled in SAT (approximately 5,500).
2. An analysis of scores from the Department of Antioquia in Colombia on the SABER test for 7th and 9th graders indicates that, on average, SAT students score slightly lower than other rural students in language and slightly higher in mathematics (Bernbaum et al., 2004).
3. See www.fundae.org for an institutional history.
4. Textbooks are softbound, black and white booklets of roughly 100 pages each. The unit cost in Honduras is approximately US \$1.50.

References and bibliography

- Alzate A.; Arbab A.; Varcarel F. 2000. *Servicio a la Comunidad Unidad 1: salud, un aspecto de bienestar* [Community Service Unit 1: health, an aspect of well-being]. Cali, Colombia: FUNDAEC. [Adapted version published by Asociación Bayan, Honduras].
- Arbab, H.; Correa, G. 2001. *Evaluation summary*. Cali, Colombia: FUNDAEC.

- Arbab, F.; Correa, G.; de Valcarcel, F. 1988. *FUNDAEC: its principles and activities*. Cali, Colombia: CELATER.
- Ball, S.J. 1998. Big policies/small world: an introduction to international perspectives in education policy. *Comparative education*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 119–130.
- Bernbaum M., et al. 2004. *Estudio de factibilidad para la posible adaptación del Programa Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) a Nicaragua* [Feasibility study for the possible adaptation of the Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) Programme to Nicaragua]. Arlington, VA: Youth Net, Family Health International.
- Bray, M. 1999. Control of education: issues and tensions in centralization and decentralization. In: Arnone, R.; Torres, C.A. eds. *Comparative education: the dialectic of the global and the local*, 2nd ed., pp. 204–228. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Burns, A., et al. 2004. *Reaching out-of-school youth with reproductive health and HIV information and services*. Arlington, VA: YouthNet Program, Family Health International. [Unpublished mimeo.].
- Dubois Herrera L.; Vega A.L.; Pavón L.R. 2001. *Informe sobre la evaluación del Programa SAT* [Report on the SAT Programme Evaluation]. Tegucigalpa: Honduran Ministry of Education. [Unpublished mimeo.] .
- Gershberg, A.; Jacobs, M. 1998. *Decentralization and recentralization: lessons from the social sectors in Mexico and Nicaragua*. Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank. (Office of the Chief Economist, Working paper, no. 379.).
- Honeyman, C. 2004. *An orientation toward human progress: developing social responsibility in rural Honduran youth through the Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University. [Senior Thesis.].
- Inter-American Development Bank. 2001. *Summary of findings: decentralization and effective citizen participation: six cautionary tales*. Washington, DC: IADB, Office of Evaluation and Oversight.
- Kabeer, N. 1999. Resources, agency, achievements: reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and change*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 435–464.
- Khan, F. 2001. *Community participation in school management in developing countries: who participates and how?*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Graduate School of Education. [Qualifying paper.].
- Khan, F. 2006. Who participates in school councils and how? *Prospects*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 97–119.
- Lareau, A. 1989. *Home advantage: social class and parental intervention in elementary education*. New York, NY: Falmer Press.
- Light, R.; Singer, J.; Willet, J. 1990. *By design: planning research on higher education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Maclure, R. 1994. Misplaced assumptions of decentralization and participation in rural communities: primary school reform in Burkina Faso. *Comparative education*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 239–254.
- McGinn, N.; Welsh, T. 1999. *Decentralization of education: why, when, what and how?*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Maxwell, J. 1996. *Qualitative research design: an interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Murphy-Graham, E. 2005. *Para Seguir Adelante: women's empowerment and the Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) Program in Honduras*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University. [Doctoral dissertation.].

- Noguera, P. 2002. Racial isolation, poverty and the limits of local control as a means for holding public schools accountable. *In Motion Magazine*, 5 May. Retrieved 14 May 2007 from <<http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/er/pnripl1.html>>.
- Paqueo, V.; Lammert, J. 2000. *Decentralization in education: Q&A for the web/knowledge nugget. Decentralization and School-Based Management Resource Kit*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Perfetti, M.; Leal, S.; Arango, P. 2001. *Experiencias alternativas para la expansión del acceso a la educación secundaria para los jóvenes en las zonas rurales: el Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) y el Modelo de Posprimaria Rural de Escuela Nueva* [Alternative experiences for the expansion and access to secondary education for youth in rural areas: the SAT Programme and the Postprimaria Rural Model of Escuela Nueva. (Paper commissioned by the Inter-American Development Bank, Centro de Estudios Regionales Cafeteros y Empresariales (CRECE), Colombia.)].
- Ramírez, R.L. 2003. *Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial: experiencia innovadora de educación rural en Colombia* [System of Tutorial Learning: innovative experience in Colombian rural education]. (Document prepared for the Presentation to the Ministry of Education of Colombia for SECAB.).
- Rivarola, M.; Fuller, B. 1999. Nicaragua's experiment to decentralize schools: contrasting views of parents, teachers, and directors. *Comparative education review*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 489–521.
- Rondinelli D.; Cheema B. 1983. Implementing decentralization policies. *In*: Cheema, B.; Rondinelli, D. eds. *Decentralization and development: policy implementation in developing countries*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stromquist, N. 2002. *Education in a globalized world: the connectivity of economic power, technology, and knowledge*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- United Nations Development Programme. 2003. *Human development report*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- USAID. 2005. Decentralization in education. *Educational quality in the developing world*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 1–4.
- Villegas-Reimers, E. 2002. Education for democracy. *Revista, Harvard Review of Latin America*. Fall. Retrieved 14 May 2007 from <<http://drclas.fas.harvard.edu/revista/articles/view/173>>.
- Wunsch, J. 1991. Institutional analysis and decentralization: developing an analytic framework for effective Third World administrative reform. *Public administration and development*, no. 11, pp. 431–451.