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LIVING WITH THE COLONIAL LEGACY: *The Ghana story*

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Introduction

This paper sets the context for the Commonwealth Centre's work in Ghana. The colonial legacy provides a powerful backdrop to the development of schools in that country, as in many other places where our work currently takes us. The work of many agencies and intervention projects both provide a vital lifeline to struggling communities but also create new kinds of tensions and inhibitions. This is the legacy and these are the foundations on which the Ghana Programme has to build, with cultural sensitivity, a continuing openness to learning and the recognition of where challenge and opportunity meet.

Reform: a continuing process

Since the watershed date of March 6, 1957 when Ghana attained independence from British Colonial rule, education has been a high priority on the government's agenda but also subject to a series of changes, constantly in search of the model which would fit the needs of the country and the expectations of its citizens.

Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president is credited with introducing free education and other social interventions that built the human resource capacities of Ghana. Speaking at Cape Coast University in March 2010 Raymond Osei said that, at independence, Ghana lacked the requisite human resource and that there was the need to develop a critical group that could assist and transform the country from a colony to a state. The establishment under the Nkrumah regime of the Ghana Education Trust schools, state corporations, roads, hospitals and factories were all aimed at making the country self-sufficient, less reliant on foreign countries and assisting in creating employment opportunities for Ghanaians.

In the period following Nkrumah, overthrown by a military coup in 1966, decades of political instability followed, marked by corruption, general macroeconomic turmoil and resulting in the mismanagement of many of the public services (Mfum-Mensah, 1998). The dramatic increase in the number of elementary and secondary schools during the Nkrumah presidency and the momentum for free universal and compulsory education, established by the

1961 Education Act was lost and, as Kingsley (2007) claims, by the 1980s, Ghana's education system had become dysfunctional.

During the five decades following the 1961 Act there were to be a series of political changes as successive administrations tried to cope with the conflicting demands of a globalization agenda and Ghana's own national cultural traditions, attempting to resolve the tensions between economic and social goals. Much of this was driven by donor agencies and their conditionalities, impossible for cash strapped governments to resist. It was not until the end of the 1980s that many of the dysfunctions were seriously addressed, with the 1987 Education Act reducing schooling from 17 years to 12 years together with a national literacy campaign for school drop-outs and adult learners. The extended period of school attendance, it was recognized, was penalising poorer rural children, as parents could not afford to have the children in school for that length of time, given that children were vital to the family economy. In addition, the Common Entrance Exam for secondary school required extra classes and tuition in order to gain entry to secondary, something only affordable by the rich (Sefa Dei and Opini, 2008).

The current system of decentralisation in Ghana was initiated in 1988, with the Local Government Law of 1988 (PNDC Law 207), establishing a local government with the District Assembly (DA) as the key institution in 110 newly designated districts within the country's ten regions. The principles of decentralization and popular participation in government were endorsed in the 1992 Constitution. The detail of this devolution of democratic decision making was set out in the Local Government Act of 1993 (Act 462). The 1992 Constitution had established a list of children's rights and Ghana became a signatory to the convention of Human Rights of the Child.

Under the civilian government of President Rawlings in 1996 Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) was designed to focus on basic educational access and quality through improving the quality of teaching and learning, efficiency in management, increasing access and local participation. The 1987 Act had given greater powers to Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) which would thereafter be responsible for local infrastructure.

The Whole School Development Programme (WSD) launched in 1987 sought to promote:

- Child-centred primary practice in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving with a view to improving the quality of teaching and learning in basic school classrooms
- Community participation in education delivery
- Competencies of teaching and learning through school-based in-service training

- Participatory planning and resource management at school and district levels
- Improved efficiency in resource management

The conclusion of Osei's 2010 study, however, was that these laudable aims will not be realised until teachers are supported enough to implement the kind of radical and widespread change implied. Reform requires that teachers 'thoroughly understand the rationale for reforms and are able to engage critically and productively with the key educational objectives of new policies through a solid understanding of contemporary educational theory and practice', unattainable, he believes, 'without a formal system of incentives and financial recompense' (ibid., p.49). Teachers need full support as public intellectuals informing moral and social debates of national importance at the local level (ibid., p.50).

2001 saw the establishment of School Management Committees (SMCs) to be instituted in all schools with the primary responsibility for 'managing the school' (Ministry of Education/Ghana Education Service, 2001, pp. ix-x) and with responsibility for determining attendance patterns, school openings and closing times most appropriate to local needs and priorities. All schools were to have PTAs as the 2001 legislation had made it 'an offence for any parent or guardian to withdraw a child from school for any purpose' (ibid., p. 4). Following a period of retrenchment it was not until 2005 that primary education became free as well as compulsory, 'viewed as a strategy to counter the paralysis that had come to characterize local decision-making in basic education by devolving control of education to districts, schools and communities' (Akyeampong, 2004).

As Akyeampong writes, FCUBE was developed on the basis of three costed components:

- Improving quality of teaching and learning through the review and revision of teaching materials, new measures on teacher incentives, and a focus on in-service teacher training.
- Strengthening management at both central and district level; and
- Improving access and participation especially through schemes that encouraged girls' participation at primary level.

The 2007 reforms which had been in preparation since 2002, were launched by President Kufuor in April of that year, introducing the new structure of junior (JHS) and senior high school (SHS), with the junior high no longer to be seen as a terminal point but as the gateway to a choice of SHS electives in General, Business, Technical, Vocational and Agricultural Education, opening up options for entry into tertiary institutions or the job market. It was acknowledged that still in 2007 around 60% of Junior Secondary School (JSS) graduates were leaving school ill

equipped and not sufficiently proficient in craft and technical skills to enter the job market. An essential component of the reform efforts was the modernisation of technical and vocational courses at Junior Secondary School level, so as to make courses both relevant and gender-free with the introduction of support and access programmes for females at all levels, particularly at the basic level and entry into TTCs. Eliminating gender stereotyping in teacher preparation and in teaching was a further measure designed to tackle discrimination and to ensure equality of access.

The thrust of the 2007 reform was to enhance the nation's human resource in the form of a skilled, technologically-advanced and disciplined workforce to service the growing economy. As the President hoped:

This should promote Ghana's surge into the Golden age of business and national prosperity. It should also reinforce Ghana's role as a beacon nation in the resurgence of Africa as envisioned in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). (<http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/education/artikel.php?ID=122293>)

As well as promising heightened priority for the education of girls the new law foregrounded the importance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the government's intent to 'extend the national broadband backbone connectivity throughout the country to facilitate the development of ICT infrastructure in schools' (ibid, p. 1)

Other elements of the reform included establishing a National Teacher's Council to regulate the profession, and a Distance Education Programme to upgrade teachers while still in service, at the same time expanding residential accommodation, lecture halls, laboratories and libraries of the 15 Universities and 10 Polytechnics in the country.

Living with the colonial legacy

School has been described as serving both 'horizontal' and 'vertical' functions, on the one hand building stronger ties and capital within family and community and, on the other, offering a ladder of opportunity to leave behind the ties that bind. The tensions between these two functions are largely a legacy of a colonial system, extending its import of schooling for the elite to a school that would be for all.

When the British officially colonised Ghana (then the Gold Coast) writes Segura (2009), they used school to educate intermediaries for colonisation, essential to their policy of indirect rule so as to impose superiority of knowledge, language and culture, cutting off pupils from

their families in order to create new breeds of indigenous elites who aligned themselves with the culture, values and world view of the colonizer.

The importing of Western formal education dates back to the castle schools at Elmina, Cape Coast and Christiansburg where merchants interested in getting interpreters to promote their trading activities were instrumental in the education of children and young people while missionaries were interested in spreading the gospel (McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975; Antwi, 1992).

The dilemma for the Ghanaian government from Nkrumah onwards was to rework the colonial legacy. His was a dream of a new independent nation, forging its own identity, away from the colonial past, but one that didn't succeed in 'decolonisation of the mind' (quoted in Arnot, 2008, p.27).

Unwittingly post-colonial African schooling practices have continued to play into these politics of hierarchisation, as evidenced through contestations of ethnicity, gender class, age, disability, language, culture, and religion as sites of difference and power (Sefa Dei and Opini, 2007, p.406)

The inferior status of girls and women, argue Sefa Dei and Opini, although endemic within African communities, was 'buttressed by the colonialist whose Victorian values about girls further reinforced the subordination of women. Colonial schools in Africa taught skills that were exclusive of women' (ibid., p.475).

The structure of schools and the nature of the school day mimic the 'Western' layout of classrooms with rows of seats, blackboards, textbooks and subject timetables, with inflexible starting times, so that if school starts at 7.45 late coming tends to be punished, often counter-productively by excluding children from lessons and making them tidy the compound. Yet many homes do not have clocks, radios or other forms of access to time keeping.

Adherence to this convention simply ignores the counsel of the 2001 Education Act which advises:

School terms and starting times could be more flexible so as to fit into the rhythm of work and emerging demands of communities with widely differing needs and priorities. For example, school terms could be varied to allow students to be home during peak harvest seasons or peak fishing seasons.

The adoption of a formal European or American model of schooling has not fulfilled the horizontal functions, rather, suggest Sefa Dei and Opini (2007), distancing children and young people from their families, reproducing inter-generational inequalities, particularly those of social class, economic background and gender.

This is, argues, Segura (2009) a key aspect of schooling, its essential function historically to separate children from home and school from work. 'It was as much about stopping one kind of education as it was a new kind of education' (ibid, p.9).

Up until the last quarter of the 19th century education was an informal process through which Ghanaian communities prepared the next generation. The first 'school' was the home: the 'teachers' were the parents and the elders in the family. The 'curriculum' was life and learning was by observation and the first major purpose of such education was the inculcation of good character and good health in the young members of the community. The second was to give them adequate knowledge of their history, beliefs and culture, thus enabling them to participate fully in social life (McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh, 1975).

The collectivist nature of education in traditional communities, writes Antwi (1992) encompassed the total way of life of the society. Education as a shared responsibility ensured that the learning of all children was the responsibility of the community. The whole community benefitted from the education of the child, individual success was a success for all and shame was equally distributed. Male and female roles were passed from fathers to sons and mothers to daughters. Far from 'liberation' of girls and women in the colonial era, according to Obeng (2002) the education of girls and young women was primarily 'to help turn out suitable wives for the European merchants who desired to marry African women. One unspoken aim was to have a Mulatto who would act as a go-between between the Africans and the Europeans' (ibid., p.19) as well as intermediary for the emergent male clerks and church officials.

'The notion of the African woman as dependent housekeeper, wife and mother confined to the home and economically dependent on the husband, the breadwinner, was introduced into African culture by Westerners', claim Odaga and Heneveld (1995, p.8). This view ignored the traditional value of African women in public and economic spheres, the role of women as chiefs in Akan society, who, writes Obeng (2002) led their tribes in battles against the colonial occupiers.

While there is a danger of romanticizing traditional practices, there is substantial evidence that the introduction of formal schooling in the Western mould did little to counter the disenfranchisement of girls and, in many respects, created new barriers to educational opportunity. When education is no longer located within the community but located in a building seven miles distant, requiring fourteen miles a day walk and the possibility of there then being no teachers when you get there, the payback in terms of what is learned is of

dubious currency. In these circumstances girls are less likely than their brothers to be sacrificed to the cause of schooling.

There is a constant complaint among headteachers that parents expect their children to help with their housework or other chores and so arrive late for school. However, as Segura (2009, p.12) comments, 'parents may not see the sacrifice of sending their children to school everyday as worthwhile. They may consider other work to be more practical'. And she adds, 'Their labour is much needed in the morning, and in what situation is it necessary for my child to learn that she has to be somewhere at 7.45 am?'

Many students continue to be marginalized and disenfranchised, at least in terms of the failure to work with their lived experiences and social realities in everyday school practice (Sefa Dei and Opini, 2007:481).

Language is also cited as a factor in the marginalization and colonization. A 2001 study by Quist in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire found that students interviewed all preferred to be taught in English or French and only 35% could speak their native language. Quist described this as indicative of cultural alienation, serving to exacerbate the gap with parents, home and community. English language, write Sefa Dei and Opini (2007) has 'cultural capital' and many Ghanaians see English as the neutral language that should be used as the medium of instruction. This is due to the linguistic discrimination among local languages in which certain languages have higher prestige than others with languages associated with the poorer parts of the country (such as Ewe in the North) looked down on by those with language seen as superior in the social hierarchy (ibid., p.478)

Quoting Fanon (1963) Sefa Dei and Opini go on to argue that:

Ghanaians who favour the use of English fail to recognise that privileging a 'foreign language' reinforces cultural imperialism and neo-colonialism, which many Africans have worked against. Privileging English robs students of their cultural heritage and renews contact with colonial practices and ideologies, making efforts of recovering self-identity and national unity self-defeating endeavours (ibid., p.479).

In more recent times the model of school improvement widely adopted in developed countries has been influential in Ghana, along with other African countries, in the form of 'whole school development' (WSD) the vehicle for the improvement of quality in primary education. As Akyeampong (2005) comments, treating schools as the unit of change, implies harnessing improvements in management strategies, in-service training, monitoring and evaluation and target setting in school development plans, and teacher appraisal, all parts of the whole orchestrating a complete change in the culture and organisation of schools.

Following a 'Western' decentralised model, headteachers and leadership teams are expected to carry the responsibility for, and be accountable for, improvement in their schools, measured primarily by 'outcomes' in the form of pupils' scores on exams. However, schools sit within a nesting of agencies and authorities that support, direct or constrain their initiative. District Assemblies, local councils and School Management Committees may either facilitate or constrain decision-making and latitude for initiative at school and classroom level.

District Assemblies are composed of 70% elected members and 30% presidential appointees with local elections taking place every four years. Elected Assembly members are the linchpin between communities and the District Assembly, in theory at least providing a two way flow of information, upwards identifying community needs, while the Assembly provides information to communities within their electoral area – a role formalised in the 1993 Local Government Act. Linkages between communities and the District Assembly are reinforced by sub-district structures - Unit Committees (UCs) throughout Ghana for settlements of approximately 1500 in urban areas and 500–1000 people in rural areas. There are also Urban, Zonal, Town and Area Councils, which 'provide mechanisms for political participation and representation, enabling demands, which could be human rights claims for instance, to be transmitted from the grassroots upwards to the DA, and, in principle at least, onwards to the national Parliament and President (Crawford, 2010, p.120).

Crawford goes on to argue that centralization is in fact limited by the nature of accountability and the political process. Local power lies not so much with the Assembly as with the District Chief Executive (DCE) a political appointee, invariably a senior local ruling party activist, appointed to this full-time position for four years, renewable for a second term. The DCE is described as the political and administrative head of the district, combining both political and executive powers.

The system by which the President appoints all District Chief Executives is the key means through which central government exerts control at district level. DCEs are upwardly accountable to the President, not downwardly accountable to the local electorate, and are used by the ruling party to implement its policies and to extend its support at local level. Further, the fact that DCEs are political appointees not civil servants confirms that their function is to strengthen and consolidate ruling party control at local level, a travesty of the supposedly non-partisan DA system (ibid., p.121).

Nonetheless, the key 'delivery' departments - health, education and agriculture – have direct lines of control and accountability to their respective line ministries not to the District Assembly. In education this is mediated by circuit supervisors who report directly to District Directors.

'How useful is the Anglo-Saxon model or Eurocentric model of decentralization for other communities in developing parts of the world?' asks Mfum-Mensah (2004, p.153). He problematizes the nature of this complex devolution, designed for 'empowerment' of local community voice and agency. He identifies three levels of participation by communities in the organization and conduct of schooling. These range from local community members playing a supportive role, through a stronger advisory function, inviting 'voice' and taking account of local concerns, to more fully blown decision-making by community members extending to full community control.

However, Mfum-Mensah's in-depth studies of communities in the northern region found that, rather than being a tool for empowering them, the shift in locus of control had produced 'conflicts, gossip and tensions among community members' (ibid., p.153). The power struggles and rivalry that emerged were, he argues, a consequence of policy makers placing responsibility on individuals with little or no experience of school management and no grounded understanding of what it means to create the conditions for learning and teaching. Hence, 'school governance may draw on conventional attitudes more than empirical fact about what promotes learning' (ibid., p.153).

In the developing world, powerful policy elites are often far removed geographically, socially, and experientially from the lived realities of marginalized groups, writes Farrell (2001), yet they make decisions about school practice for these groups. Those decisions, however, result in schooling practices that do not answer the educational needs of these communities and therefore result in marginal school participation. Yet attempts to engage and involve community members in decision-making run into their own problems. There is a substantial literature (Anzar, 1998; Farrell, 2001; Farrell and Mfum-Mensah, 2002, Mfum-Mensah, 2004, 2009) that argues participation may not necessarily empower all community members because during the process certain groups or individuals are likely to emerge as elites who possess more knowledge and whose input therefore has more influence. The School for Life (SFL) curriculum, in northern Ghana, although credited with success in raising levels of literacy (Hartwell, 2006), and providing a platform for marginalized communities who ordinarily would not be involved in decisions about their children's education, found its inclusive aims were often thwarted by a small group of community members who emerged as the ultimate decision makers.

The failure of policy in adopting decentralization models lies in the lack of support for communities to exercise what is a sensitive and complex role, with the result that the process is

actually detrimental to the purposes it seeks to pursue. The problem is that the concept of decentralization also assumes that communities are homogenous. However, as Mfum-Mensah's study reveals, even in the most seemingly homogenous traditional communities, there is:

intra-community heterogeneity due to gender differences, land acquisition, political power, family groups or clanship, and other community factors such as jealousy, rivalry, gossip, personal misunderstandings and familial conflict can impact upon any decentralizing effort (ibid., p.153).

As Dei (2004) argues, post-colonial education has largely been approached in terms of its assumed contributions to national development, while the human dimensions of education have neither been fully grasped nor understood. The debates about school reforms and educational change have not been concretely addressed to make a difference in the lives of learners. And while broader questions of equity and social justice have been acknowledged at the rhetorical level they have left largely untouched glaring disparities and inequities, structured along lines of ethnicity, culture, language, religion, gender, and class.

It is through an understanding of identity, difference and the cultural politics of schooling, argue Sefa Dei and Opini (2007), together with a grasp of how these are formed and addressed, that holds the key to bringing about social and educational change. In the interests of sameness, uniformity, normality, 'differences of culture, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic class background, language and religion are swept under the carpet' (ibid., p.467).

The cultural and economic challenge

The size of the country, the dispersion of the population from north to south and east to west, the urban-rural divide, the formal and informal economies and the colonial legacy which underpins all reform efforts provide the backdrop to the reform of the education system. It is 'a country marked by extraordinary diversity' writes Osei (2006, p.43).

Religion divides the country geographically and culturally. The predominance of Christianity in the south is explained by missionaries who settled along the coast and moved inland, but no further than to anywhere in which Islam had already been established. These areas, predominantly in the north of the country were the result of Islam migrating from the Arabian Peninsula and across the Sahara. These two migrations from the south coast and from the northern borders sowed the seed for the geographical and religious dichotomy between north and south and economic factors which attend those differences.

According to Obeng (2002) successive colonial governments systematically deprived northern regions of financial support, encouraging a migration of people from northern territories to the south. This was a sustained policy of the British, who conscripted load carriers, either not paid or poorly paid and 'systematically deceived by the British, through propaganda, to migrate southward to work in the mines and cocoa plantations' (ibid., p.43). They were treated as pariahs by southerners and deprived of schooling and access to literacy. Because of the financial situation of most of these workers, 'their children dropped out of school and ended up as street children, prostitutes, street vendors, itinerant hawkers or load carriers' (ibid., p.44).

As described by numerous commentators and discussed above, the arrival of schools posed a threat to family and community. As Roberts (1982) writes - westernisation was a disruptive influence on the established order and introduced a conflict of authority – 'the authority of parents over their children threatened by the demands of schooling.... In the midst of these conflicts, teachers had a hard time' (ibid., p.269), heightened by 'the fear that schools turned out "trouble makers"' (ibid., p.272). Teachers faced both active and passive hostility, writes Roberts, in a climate where, in the early 20th century, attendance at school relied on threats, bribery, payment to informers for every child recruited, and physical coercion exercised by the district commissioner and the native police.

The problem is that 'trouble making' is an inherent function of an educational system, questioning and upsetting the status quo. Yet at the same time the ladder of opportunity does not always lead to a better place. While historically, as Roberts argues, 'schooling must have seemed quite fundamentally irrelevant and had justifiably undesirable consequences' (ibid., p.271), still today parents' decision to keep children out of school can often seem a rational decision when school attendance may hold little promise of a better life either for the child or the family and may be seen as risky in a physical, psychological or emotional sense.

Sefa Dei and Opini (2007) also point to an added disincentive - parental resentment that schools failed to accommodate religious identity while Muslim parents kept their children out of school for fear of religious indoctrination. Schooling brings with it costs in a number of senses, cultural and economic opportunity costs, as the loss of the wage earner in the family (particularly in the case of girls) has not been able to offer any tangible returns.

Dualities in the purposes and functions of schools remain in a system under pressure to expand, to adjust its curriculum, to meet demands of economy and democracy, harnessing the desire for self improvement yet with respect for traditional values. How could schools

contribute to building Nkrumah's dream of creating a proud and self confident national identity, a valuing of the cultural heritage and inter generational and community traditions?

Five decades on from the Nkrumah regime, poverty remains the key factor in access to education and employment, and while the percentage of the population in poverty has reduced from 52% in 1991/92 to 29% in 2005/6 (World Bank, 2007), reduction in poverty and improvements in macro-economic performance have done nothing to reduce inequalities, writes Palmer (2008). 'In fact these have widened while 90% of employment is still in the informal economy' (ibid., p.133).

While education in Ghana at the basic level now reaches most young people and has expanded at a rate far exceeding the country's economic growth, it has enabled employers to select from a wider pool of educated labour and to demand higher credentials from prospective employees. This 'qualifications inflation' has deflated wage premiums for education and encouraged students to pursue more education, producing an 'inflationary' cycle in which people chase higher qualifications. Shunning vocational routes in favour of the academic continues because opportunity and better salaries continue to be found in clerical and especially government occupations (Rolleston and Oketch, 2008). Boateng and Ofori-Sarpong (2002) in their study of the market for graduates in Ghana reported that 84% expected a wage on graduation significantly higher than those on offer. Where additional education does not add further to productivity there is little reason for employers to raise wages and hence returns to education may be expected to decline (Rolleston and Oketch, 2008).

Quoting Teal's finding (2000), that in the manufacturing sector there was substitution towards unskilled labour away from skilled, Rolleston and Oketch conclude that, 'owing perhaps to pressure to reduce costs post-liberalization, unskilled labour may ironically have become more attractive to employers in spite of the greater availability of skilled labour' (ibid., p.337). They conclude:

Moreover, rapid educational expansion de-linked from economic opportunity may be associated with a number of negative effects including increasing difficulty for the poorest in accessing the 'educational route' out of poverty, an increasing psychological sense of 'under-development' and disadvantage, and an inflationary cycle which devalues educational credentials while further increasing demand for education (ibid., p.338)

Urban areas such as Accra with their stronger economic base and higher local revenue generating capacity have relatively more resources available in social services, health, employment and education. In the north and north-east of the country bordering on Burkina Faso and Togo the population is scattered thinly in small settlements. Northern, Upper West

and Upper East (the three regions which together comprise 'the North') are inhabited by 10% of the Ghana population, with the majority of the population there (70%) in informal agriculture with the remaining 30 economically inactive or unemployed.

Crawford's study (2010) of two communities in the north reported that there was no access to electricity, and, although most communities were connected by feeder roads, over 50% of the roads were seasonally unmotorable with bicycles being the only viable means of transport. The poor road situation not only limits access to economic activities but also limits access to social facilities including education and health. Lack of proper sanitation, inadequate public or private toilet facilities by which to dispose of faecal matter, expose community members to health hazards such as cholera, diarrhoea, dysentery and trachoma. Without access to safe drinking water (treated water, boreholes and hand dug wells), a direct consequence is that these communities have the highest incidences of guinea worm infestation in the world. Crawford also reported a food deficit suffered by the poorest families during the 'lean period' between harvests, a period that could extend from April to August. Another survey of selected districts in 2009 (SEND-Ghana) found that 45% of schools in the Ghana School Feeding Programme had no access to water, 87% had no hand washing facilities while 26% had no access to toilet facilities. Without immediate access to water it tended to be the girls who were sent to try and find it.

Among governmental priority goals are sensitisation programmes designed to raise communities' awareness of the value of formal education for girls, particularly at the basic level but premised on 'adequate sanitation facilities' for girls and women teachers and a supply of potable water within 500m of all school sites. The appointment of a designated school health officer would attend to the many obstacles to engagement with school, including basic knowledge and resourcing in first aid. Educating and disseminating information in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention and management is both an education and health and welfare concern. The goal of establishing effective guidance and counseling systems for pupil/student welfare at all levels is relevant not only to HIV/AIDS but with the wider intent of pastoral care.

Ghana Living Standards Surveys (GLSS 3/4/5) found that the poverty level had reduced from 51.7% in the 1991/92 to 28.5% in the year 2005/06. The majority of those below the poverty line were predominantly in the north. The equitable administration of the School Feeding Programme, initiated to support children in the most deprived of circumstances, was, however, not helped by what a 2008 Price Waterhouse Cooper report described as 'widespread corruption' among the programme secretariat.

UNICEF's (2006) estimate of 11.6% of the population as 'unemployed' tells a partial story. Ghana, like many other African countries, is witnessing a deforestation and de-agrarianisation of rural land, accelerating the migration of young people to cities, a generation unwilling to continue the family legacy of subsistence farming. These young people are entering the informal economy, marooned in a no man's land of living by their wits, and without legitimate avenues of economic advance, become vulnerable to exploitation and criminal activity for which there is a ready market.

Girls and young women isolated in the city, homeless and vulnerable, are subject to exploitation by night guards, security personnel and by a whole range of urban predators buying or requiring sexual favours, unwilling to use condoms and raising HIV risks and illegal abortions. The Chief Executive of the Accra Metropolitan Authority reported in 2001 that 'hundreds of black bags containing aborted fetuses are picked up daily in the Accra metropolis' (quoted in Obeng, 2002). The sale, inducements and use of illegal drugs have also to be factored into the equation. Ghana is one of the world's major transit areas for the trafficking of cocaine and other narcotic drugs to Europe.

'To be young in Africa [has come] to mean being disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginal in the political and economic sense' (Abbink, 2005, p.7 quoted in Arnot) which he describes as 'faulty modernisation'. Young people, with less and less in common with their parents and the older generation, increasingly with access to television, mobile phones and internet, look to Western mores in preference to the traditional values of their communities.

Children and young people are caught between two cultures, differing expectations and the push-pull of life in the community and life on the streets. An economy that depends on a mobile, flexible and skilled workforce does not sit comfortably with traditions of collective responsibility, writes Arnot (2008, p.2). The Ministry of Manpower Development and Employment (2002) found that 32% of school leavers had no skills relevant to the world of work and that 15,800 teenagers (15-16 year olds) were simply 'thrown on to the streets' with nothing to do and no skills to help them.

If we as a society look on unconcerned while children between the ages of seven and twelve drop out of school and take to hawking on the street, we end up creating breeding grounds for all imaginable forms of social vices
(AllAfrica, 2010, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201004160838.html>)

Oduro (2008) reported that 17% of the 15 to 24 cohort and 31% of the 25 to 35 age cohort had never been to school. In 2006 The literacy rate among adults was less than 5% and

less than 40% of children under the age of 14 attended school, with the majority of non-attenders being girls (Akyeampong, 2006, p.221).

Growing up as a girl in Ghana

Gender inequality remains, in common with many other African countries, an issue which government seeks to address but acknowledges the long-term implications of changing mindsets, traditions and vested interests. In a Ghana Education Service 2004 report to The International Conference on Education in Geneva (ICE), the challenges to the inclusion of girls were identified as:

Abject poverty in certain parts of the country

- The presence of anti girl-child socio-cultural practices
- Lack of direct private sector financial support for girls
- Poor quality of teaching and learning
- Parents' unwillingness to allow their children, especially girls, to walk long distances to school for safety reasons
- Absence of girl friendly school facilities forcing girls to drop out of school at adolescent age (The Development of Education National Report of Ghana, p.12)

One of the major constraints which militates against girls' access and achievement is the low presence of female teachers in deprived rural areas, writes Casely-Hayford, (2007), adding that the GES was reluctant to post women to areas where they would be 'handicapped or fall victim to local chiefs or rich farmers who wanted to take them as their second wife' (ibid., p.5).

Hedges (2002), citing GES advice, adds:

Women teachers, who make up over 30% of training college graduates are not to be posted to rural areas, despite the positive impact this might have on girls' enrollment. It is a practice that recognises two Ghanaian realities: parents' fear that their daughters may lose their 'marriage market' or be put in the vulnerable position, and middle class husbands' reluctance for their wives to work in rural areas (p. 357).

The predominance of male teachers in poorer rural areas reinforces the view of 'man's work' and deprives girls both of role models and people they can speak to about feminine issues, people who share a sense of identity and whose teaching they can relate to. A student interviewed by Sefa Dei and Opini (2007) said this:

'You see, when you always have male teachers teaching you, they teach from a male perspective. They give you male examples. And maybe female students cannot relate to the way they teach. And why they don't find it attractive to be in the school or university' (ibid., p.477).

This is exacerbated, suggest Sefa Dei and Opini by male teachers also discouraging female students from taking some subjects which in turn closes off certain male-dominated career paths while opportunities for women are usually in traditionally female target areas for which the market demand is often limited (Palmer, 2009, p.136).

This stereotyping has created a situation in which girls internalize a sense of inferiority in schools and perceive any differential treatment with boys as 'normal treatment' because it is justified culturally. As a result girls rarely challenge the marginalizing school system' (Sefa Dei and Opini, p.478).

Launching a new programme directed at marginalised groups, in May 2010, the Vice President, John Dramani Mahama, noted that 'whilst enrolment and gender parity rates have steadily improved at the lower primary level, this has not translated into increased retention of children, particularly girls and children with disability, in the upper primaries and junior high schools'. (<http://www.vso.org.uk/news/press-release/27152/>)

Domestic violence remained an overt issue in almost half the northern Ghanaian communities visited by Crawford (2010), with reproductive rights breached by the relative powerlessness of women to negotiate with their husbands with regard to sexual activity and family size. Witchcraft allegations and banishment had occurred in four communities in recent years, despite often being referred to as a thing of the past. Violations of girls' rights occurred in three main ways: abuse of fostering arrangements; forced marriage through betrothal to older men; and the migration of adolescent girls to cities in order to undertake 'head portering' work, often due to a lack of livelihood opportunities at home.

Fostering is a consequence of extreme poverty. Parents accept the payment of a lump sum of money or a cow in exchange for their child's labour. These children, write Fentiman, Hall and Bundy, (2001) are often mistreated. In the case of boys 'Many are forced to continue diving [to tie up or release fishing nets] for several hours a day and are often beaten. One senior official revealed that every month a child dies in the lake because of overwork or exhaustion' (ibid., p.337).

There is also a tradition of 'pawning' or debt fosterage using children as collateral for loans, working for the creditor until the debt is repaid, giving the creditor rights over the labour of the child for the period of his or her indenture. The related practice of last resort of hiring out young females as mothers and carers of younger children limits women's access to, and participation in, education.

Support, partnerships, intervention and subvention

Transformation of the system is a task beyond the resources of the Ministry and GES alone. It relies on the support of numerous donor agencies, the G8 countries, The World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, USAid, the Commonwealth Fund and many other projects, most with limited life and therefore not able to follow through on and sustain change. The system also benefits from voluntary service. For example, Comic Relief and Voluntary Service Overseas provide support for intervention strategies in the most disadvantaged areas of the country and for the most marginalised groups. When the Programme was launched in 2003, 54 volunteer teachers took part. By 2006/07 this had grown to 8,000 and in the 2007/08 school year, 13,000 volunteers were posted to all ten regions of Ghana (Hart, CEF, Final Report, 2009).

A three-year grant from the Cadbury Schweppes Foundation has been used to recruit and train 36 Rural Education Volunteers (REVs) to assist schools in 18 educationally underserved communities in selected cocoa-growing areas. These volunteers were funded to become fully trained teachers.

The Action for Rural Education (ARE), describing itself as a capacity building programme has focused on building and strengthening community agencies, networks and their relationship with schools. So, for example, ARE has reactivated dormant School Management Committees, helping them develop and carry through Community-School Advocacy Plans, helping to embed budget tracking, providing training and monitoring of the capitation grant. Its advocacy has been instrumental in passing by-laws prohibiting the use of children on farms during school hours and SMC members have been helped to engage with parents who do not adhere to the by-laws. Working with District Assemblies and the GES it has helped to finance the building of new schools and classrooms, increasing enrolment and dramatically improving retention rates. Children who had previously walked up to seven miles to school are now able to attend schools in their own communities.

Working to demystify education budgets and spending has been hugely significant in allaying suspicion and rumour, concludes the CEF. Transparency of funding and expenditure has allowed community members to see how money is being used and for what purposes, and to have a say in spending priorities. Suspicion as to how teachers were using contributions from parents has gone, it is claimed, finding that parents are much more inclined to contribute their time, effort and money to support the needs of the school (CEF, Final Report, 2009).

The introduction of a community scorecard enabling local people to assess the performance of local schools using education expenditure information, has been one of the contributions of the Commonwealth Education Fund which has supported training for more than 600 people in 10 districts. While the scorecard has an accountability function its greater educational contribution lies in stimulating informed dialogue and consensus building in areas such as poor school infrastructure and weak school management.

The Commonwealth Education Fund also enables partners such as the Pan African Organisation for Sustainable Development (POSDEV), Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC) and Northern Ghana Network for Development (NGND) to provide district and national level budget monitoring training. It has supported activities such as The Northern Network for Education Development (NNED)'s work with more than 400 traditional rulers in Northern Ghana to secure morally binding declarations from traditional rulers to promote girls' education and to eradicate harmful traditional practices. Ghana was one of the Commonwealth Education Fund countries that implemented the Gender Equality in Education Project (GEEP) and with the mentoring support of the CEF gender mentor, GNNEC and NNED revised their plans to ensure that education issues affecting boys, girls, men and women were realised in day-to-day school and classroom practice. According to the Final report (CEF, 2009):

This created better understanding among partners around the socio-cultural construction of gender and gender inequalities, and helped them use creative strategies to achieve change, e.g. the introduction of by-laws that prevent girls being taken out of school for long periods to attend funeral ceremonies. District Assembly members pledged to present papers in the Assemblies on the need to abolish practices that keep children, particularly girls, out of school (ibid., p.28).

Other donor interventions include Plan Ghana, a child development-oriented non-government organisation (NGO) operating in 54 communities in the Mfantseman Municipality, Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese and Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam Districts of the Central Region. Another intervention targeted at a given number of communities is USAID and AED's GRAIL programme to improve basic schools in 29 deprived districts in the three regions in the north. The Grant and Reporting Accountability Improve Literacy (GRAIL) is aimed, among other things, at increasing the capacity of staff of district education offices in some deprived districts to plan and carry out locally relevant education improvement activities. Under the programme, each of the implementing districts are required to put together a proposal as to how to enhance literacy among pupils in the district. A grant of GH¢28,000, made available to the districts, is earmarked to secure the implementation of the programme.

Again in Northern Ghana, in Jirapa, West Mamprusi and Talensi-Nabdam regions TENI (Tackling Education Needs Inclusively programme) aims to improve the quality of education for 50,000 children, focused primarily on girls and disabled children. Funded by Comic Relief, TENI works with government, community leaders, education professionals and civil society to improve the retention and performance of children in primary school. This is to be realised through improving the supply and skills of teachers, working together with District Assemblies to improve the coordination and implementation of education initiatives, and, at community level addressing socio-economic barriers. Improving the livelihoods of women is the precondition for their ability and willingness to support their children going to school.

While VSO has had a rapidly expanding programme to address teacher shortage, in recent years it has had a longer term capacity development thrust. There is a strategic shift from voluntary classroom service to a more capacity orientated approach in which volunteers are placed in management and training roles within district education offices and teacher training colleges with a focus on pedagogy. Volunteers also provide support and advocacy for other agencies, encouraging community involvement in school development and addressing barriers to school education, particularly for girls.

Launching the TENI initiative, Ghanaian Vice President Mahama acknowledged the government's reliance on high quality voluntary service, noting that '800,000 children are still waiting for their right to education', adding that the goal of providing quality equitable and timely education for all children by 2015 was hugely reliant on government partnership with other agencies.

Today, writes Segura (2009) outside aid funds education to US\$45 million. The Government of Ghana, in comparison, provides 2.5 million (Government of Ghana/Ministry of Education and Sports, 2007). This substantive funding allows foreign aid agencies, especially USAID, DIFD, JICA5 and The World Bank, to leverage major conditionalities in the education sector, a power that, according to Segura, undermines the leadership role of the national government. 'In these ways colonial powers and donors have set up structures of schooling that carry political meaning and values, and they continue to limit and create possibilities of what school is in Ghana' (p.13).

The leverage which external bodies are able to exert is related to the economic status of the country. By the mid 90s Ghana was heavily indebted, and by the late 90s subject to inflation and economic problems. In 2000 Ghana joined HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) to receive debt relief. Receiving HIPC debt relief involves signing on to more conditions and

strictures set by The World Bank and The IMF which include education as a 'human right' (UNESCO 2007). While this may be both laudable and uncontentious, the fact that it is treated as equivalent to compulsory attendance at school cast in a Western mould, is, as Segura (2009) argues, to miss the point - 'It is important for the donors to understand that this is a contextual and structural problem and not a managerial problem with technocratic fixes' (ibid., p.7).

Curriculum matters

The history of colonisation and the influence of external donor agencies is reflected in what is widely acknowledged (Godwyll, 2008; Segura, 2009; Coe, 2005) as a cumbersome and inappropriate curriculum. Low levels of pupil achievement remain a matter of concern. In 2009 Ghana ranked 47th (out of 47) on the international benchmark in mathematics and 48th (out of 48) in science and is last among the four African countries that participated in the international survey. The data revealed that as many as 87% of the Ghanaian students did not reach the low international benchmark in science; and similarly, 91% did not reach it in mathematics. With regard to the intermediate international benchmarks as many as 97% and 98% of the Ghanaian students did not reach this level in science and mathematics respectively. (<http://news.peacefmonline.com/social/200910>).

In all the participating African countries in the above survey it was found that no provisions are made in their national curricula for addressing the issue of students with different levels of ability in science and mathematics. That is, there is no differentiation of the content of the science and mathematics curricula to meet the learning needs of groups of students with different levels of abilities. In other words, all students are made to experience the same amount and type of content in mathematics and science. Seven separate Education Acts between 1967 and 2004 had attempted to address the content and structure of the curriculum but, writes Godwyll (2008, p.113), they 'have not succeeded in shifting the paradigm dramatically'.

2007 marked a major reform initiative with universal primary education to become 11 years, and extension of Education services to library, information, guidance and counseling and distance education. At Kindergarten level the emphasis would be on numeracy and creative arts through play, while at lower primary English and the dominant Ghanaian language should, together with basic mathematical skills and Natural Science, form the core of the curriculum. In

the Upper Primary from P4 to P6 Integrated Science and Citizenship would be added to the core while practical subjects would include Physical Education, Music, Dance, and Creative Arts.

In order to monitor and raise standards the Ghana Education Reform Act of 2007 established a new national Inspectorate (NIB) under the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MOESS) with responsibility for monitoring of standards through quality assurance inspections.

Restructuring, expansion, inclusion and curricular reform all underlined the need for more and better qualified teachers. With pupil numbers growing almost exponentially, the Ministry calculated that the total number of teachers needed to keep pace was doubling every 18 years. It was estimated that about 10% of the total number of teachers were untrained, that is, around 24,000, mainly serving in rural and underserved areas (Osei, 2006). The upgrading of formal qualifications is, however, compromised by low salary levels (despite significant salary increases both in 1991 and 2000) and teachers' need to earn extra money through taking on part time jobs out of school hours. This is in addition to unpaid tasks which teachers often take on, such as helping out with clerical tasks and organising extra-curricular activities. A further explanation is offered by Godwyll (2008) who found that students who had failed or simply scraped through in Maths and Science at school entered training colleges 'which became breeding grounds for student-teachers who had a weak base in math, English and science. For more qualified graduates, he adds, 'teaching continues to be a last resort option rather than intentional choice' (ibid., p.119).

The findings of Godwyll's study drew attention to contextual factors, influencing poor performance, common to other African states. These were found to be:

- teachers with no university degree or its equivalent in teaching science and mathematics
- poor and erratic attendance
- lack of provision for differentiation of the content of the science and mathematics curricula to meet the learning needs of groups of students with different levels of abilities
- low participation in public, national or international assessment exercises
- little use of technology (i.e. computers and calculators) in the science and mathematics curricula

In addition, van der Linde (2005) contends that the poor performance needs to be attributed to other factors including issues of poverty, resources and infrastructure of schools; low teacher qualification; poor learning cultures in schools; language proficiency and issues of conceptual and cognitive demands placed on students.

The priority given to basic resourcing in the primary sector, to improving access, basic literacy skills and raising standards has meant less latitude for investment in the secondary sector. There is, as Teal (2001, p.6) puts it, 'a clear hierarchy of use for education'. The question 'What are we educating people for?' is a matter of continuing debate, and there is a lack of consensus among commentators as to the returns on investment of basic schooling.

The devaluation of the currency of basic education, reported by the World Bank has led to an ongoing debate about the benefits, and return to the economy, of basic education as against secondary and tertiary education. This, it is claimed, leads policy makers to divert investment and professional development more towards the secondary sector where returns are most salient. This may, however, prove to be misleading, as Palmer claims, "a good quality basic education is essential to maintain quality outcomes at higher levels' and 'improving the quality of basic education is also dependent on having a stronger and more equitable post-basic education and training system' (2009, p.14).

Referring to an earlier 2004 World Bank report King and Palmer write:

Given the investment found in Ghana has been on primary or basic education – to a greater extent than it has been at the post-basic level, it might be a lack of teachers and educational managers – who are products of post basic education – has resulted in its declining quality at lower levels (2006:22-23)

How to respond to the growing demand for post-basic education while continuing to sustain gains made in the primary sectors is a major challenge, concluded a 2008 World Bank report. It pointed out that enrolment in junior secondary schools had risen by 35% between 2001/2 and 2006/7, a direct effect, according to Palmer (2009) of the FCUBE policy and the institution of the capitation grant.

As demand grows and aspirations rise the lack of systemic capacity creates an increasingly acute problem. There are simply 'an insufficient number of spaces for basic education leavers' (Palmer, 2009, p.135) with 10% of qualified candidates unable to find a place. Palmer goes on to argue that lack of transparency and perceived unfairness in the selection of junior secondary graduates for senior secondary underlines the need for a more centralised selection process in order to ensure fairness. To address these problems, the government introduced the Computerized School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS), which places students in the schools according to merit and based on their raw scores. The result is a system that has increased the number of qualified students enrolled in the Secondary

Schools and Technical Institutions throughout the country by 16% irrespective of where the school is located and whether or not it is a community type.

While the policy is to dramatically expand technical vocational provision (TVSD), there are concerns that ‘expansion in quantity may come at the expense of achieving and sustaining improvement in training quality – in a system already suffering crises of quality and relevance’ (Palmer, 2009, p.136).

While there is a highly developed apprenticeship system which offers sector-specific training, a RECOUP study on apprenticeship (Monk, Sandefur and Teal, 2008) found that ‘workers who did an apprenticeship are now earning less than other workers who did not do this type of training’ (ibid., p.31). This is apparently because entering the apprenticeship scheme ‘puts worker on the path to the informal sector and shuts them out of more lucrative formal sector jobs’ (ibid., p.31).

Conditions for learning

“Which is better, a child who doesn’t go to school or one who has the chance to be taught under a tree?” asked Bannerman Mensah in 2006 in his role as then Deputy Director General of the Ghana Education Service (UNIRIN, 2006). It was a comment made in reply to the criticism of continuing infrastructural problems in many parts of the country, a consequence of a growing demand for schooling. Four years on from that speech it is claimed that 3,947 schools are still conducted under trees (Editorial, 16th April, 2010 <http://www.afrika.no>) while churches and community centres are used to house the growing numbers of children now wishing to attend school. ‘It stands to reason’, said Bannerman Mensah, ‘that if even we are to rid the street of all the children there will not be enough classrooms to accommodate all of them, that is the dilemma and irony we are presented with’.

Cecilia Obeng’s title for her 2002 book *Home was Uncomfortable School was Hell* captures through case studies the difficulties faced by children and young people in trying to balance the domestic demands of the domestic economy with homework and home study. Very few homes had electricity or other forms of lighting. Most had, or still have, kerosene lamps ‘which come with their own associated accidents and tragedies’. Nor was that limited resource always available. Describing her own experience as a child she writes:

I remember very well that my grandmother saw no need to give us girls her kerosene lamp to study. Preference had to be given to the boys whose duty it was to study well, do well in life and then look after us girls (ibid., p.28)

It is a challenging task to offer generalised descriptions of the quality of learning and teaching in Ghanaian schools as so much depends on the part of the country in question, the local community, the staffing and resourcing and intervention projects and action research studies which focus on particular projects with selected teachers and selected schools. Numerous agencies, researchers and development teams are active in different parts of the country, selected communities or districts. So, accounts can differ widely in their characterisation of classroom practice. Nor do policy documents, rhetorical pronouncement, observations and quality assurance reports necessarily offer a true picture of the pedagogy which the Ministry, universities and funding bodies aspire to achieve.

The following statement, for example, is much more about aspiration than reality.

Ghanaian teachers began using the 'activity method' of teaching since educational reforms were passed in 1987. In contrast to the past when teachers simply lectured, teachers now allow the children to express their view about the topic he [the teacher] is coming to teach' (Dull, 2004)

For other commentators (Dull, 2004; Obeng, 2002; Segura, 2009) such claims appear more as wishful thinking, given that education reforms do not produce change in quite such an immediate and linear fashion. What is understood by 'activity methods' is also open to wide interpretation. If any generalisations about teaching and learning in Ghanaian schools do hold up, it would be teacher question and pupils response, individual or whole class. As Dull (2004) describes it:

Maintaining student discipline through teacher-dominated methodologies and teacher discipline [is] by following standardized procedures ... maintaining orderly classrooms and pleasing supervisors (ibid., p.312).

She cites examples of tutors and supervisors' verdicts of good practice as, lessons which never deviate from the textbook with their judgments of a good lesson based on a scrutiny of blackboard work alone. Art projects and other more student-centred activities are discouraged because they may lead to indiscipline, and group work means that 'if students sit in groups they will be playing or chatting'. Rote methods are compelling because children have to commit much to memory in order to pass exams, especially those in a second language (Dull, 2004, pp.307-312).

Inclusion policies, while also found to be problematic elsewhere (MacBeath and Galton, 2008), are particularly acute in a country with limited resources and inadequate professional expertise. A study by Ocloo and Subbey (2008) revealed that while most teachers supported the notion of Inclusive Education Policy, in principle, they added the precondition that there

needed to be a change in attitudes of teachers, peers, boards of management, and parents/caregivers to provide assistance for children with special needs. The authors point out that currently most headteachers in Ghana reject the admission of students with disabilities because such children will lower the academic standard of the school. As schools are preoccupied with results, teachers are unhappy to have children with special needs in their classrooms and advise parents that their children should go to the special schools.

Furthermore teachers argue that they do not have the necessary training and educational resources to accommodate these children, particularly in overcrowded classrooms, while teachers' colleges and universities need to have more trained lecturers to develop more courses in special education.

Government support is also mentioned by Ocloo and Subbey as essential to the effective implementation of inclusive education policy, involving training of specialists to support teachers, and provision of funds for teaching and learning resources and facilities in schools.

Conditions for teaching

Many children do not have the luxury of a classroom but rather the shade of a tree. Many teachers do not have a common room; they have a 'common tree'. If conditions for learning constrain the ambitions of governments and educators, conditions for teaching severely limit what teachers can do and the lack of basic resources acts as powerful disincentive for many teachers to go to the schools where they are most needed. Teachers who live in cities such as Accra, when posted to rural communities find it difficult to live there without the Internet, electricity, drinking water and basic amenities (Ghana Web, 10 February 2010). It is estimated that 10,000 teachers leave the service each year, in large part due to the unpropitious conditions they have to work in, the resultant job satisfaction that accrues and the relatively low status that they enjoy. Described by the Daily Graphic as 'the unsavoury ritual', the late payment of salaries reinforces the idea, in the eyes of teachers and the communities that they work in, that they are of low status, and their work is of little use (Hedges, 2002, p.359)

As qualified teachers leave the profession, the gaps are filled by unqualified staff. There are, it is estimated, 24,000 untrained teachers (about 10% of the total number of teachers) serving in rural and underserved areas.

As noted earlier in relation to earning money, taking on outside employment is necessary as most in-school roles performed by teachers, with the exception of the school principal, are

unpaid. These voluntary commitments shorten the amount of time teachers have to prepare lesson plans and to do other paid work, especially if they are working the “double shift”. The responsibility payment of one Cedi (50 pence) is hardly likely to inspire the calibre of teacher governments and employers wish to recruit. In his study of teachers’ work Osei (2006) commented that the competence of teachers, at every level of the system, was roundly condemned by employers.

Local employers expressed dismay with the skills shown by local graduates from junior and senior secondary schools. They condemned the education system and criticized the apparent incompetence of teachers (ibid., p.43)

However, there are, writes Osei, few tangible incentives for teachers to upgrade their qualifications, none of which appear to offer promotion since promotion is achieved primarily through seniority, devotion to extra-curricular school activities or through family/kin connections to senior bureaucrats. Secondly, although distance-learning programs are available, upgrading formal qualifications costs money for enrolment and tuition, and teachers’ wages are very low. Finally, studying towards a new degree is time consuming, and most teachers spend any spare time they have earning money through taking on more teaching commitments or part-time jobs (ibid., p.45).

In many parts of the country, according to Roberts (2009) teachers have to deal with tensions between the perceptions of the local community and the views of the District Office. While the District Office has its own professional criteria, exercised to some extent at a bureaucratic distance, the eyes and ears of the local community are alert moment by moment to potential, or real, indiscretions. Villagers know how frequently teachers are absent from the classroom. They are acutely aware of any indiscretion, excessive drinking or sexual impropriety.

Underlying this is often a resentment of accepting a professional in the community, one who possesses an alien authority over their children and disciplinary measures which parents may regard as inappropriate. Sometimes it is seen as an abuse of their authority when teachers require children to carry out tasks, such as carrying water, that benefit teacher’s homes or gardens. It is a source of resentment when privileges derive from a teacher’s status, such as not being required to undertake communal village tasks, and enjoying a privileged lifestyle which creates unfair competition with village men over access to girls and young women. Most teachers are young men, and most are unmarried or do not have their wives living with them, writes Roberts (2009). As wage earners, they have more money at their disposal for gifts than,

for example, unemployed school leavers or young men dependent upon their relatives.

Teachers usually have more privacy in their rented or free rooms, 'while the school building itself is notoriously a place of assignation' (ibid., p.275).

While the Education Office has a small Inspectorate Division, they are generally unaware of the day-to-day practices of its teachers. These are, however, brought to the attention of the District Office by community members. Roberts (2009, p.276) describes the existence in the Education Office of a thick file marked "Anonymous Letters", signed by "Worried" or "Parent" but most signed by a chief and his elders, or a Village Development Committee. Some of these, writes Roberts, must be counted as simply malicious, yet others concern serious disputes going on over long periods. They are all letters of complaints against teachers, often accompanied by letters of denial from the teachers themselves. These letters list complaints ranging from the constant absenteeism of teachers, to accusations that they have obtained their jobs by forging their Middle School Leaving Certificates, or that they have refused to attend Village Development Committee meetings concerning school matters, or that they have had sexual affairs with schoolgirls, or have extorted money from pupils, or have administered excessive punishments. Many conclude with such threats as, "If we notice that the staff are allowed to teach at village X again, we shall permit our children to attend school elsewhere."

According to Roberts, the Education Office claims that it investigates these complaints, but in many cases there are long delays which do not end up with the removal of the teacher - which was what, in most cases, had been demanded. When the complaints are not investigated to the satisfaction of the community, there are various ways in which it, or its members, may take action ranging from personal attack, to appeal to alternative sources of authority, or to the exercise of community sanctions against residents.

'Seduction charges' may be brought against teachers, not necessarily because they are responsible for pregnancies but because they are the only persons who could be expected to pay such large sums. Teachers may also be threatened by bysuman, or ('juju') placed on their desks and may experience action taken against themselves or their property. They may find it difficult to buy food in the village and may, exceptionally, be thrown out of their accommodation. When conflict reaches the point at which village political authority intervenes, the first step is usually to withdraw the privilege that the village considers it extends to teachers as professionals: that is, the waiving of the obligation to perform communal labor.

Appointing teachers in pairs, perhaps husband and wife, suggests Hedges (2002) appears to have some beneficial effect, particularly for women. This allied to offering enhanced

opportunities for advancement through what the government describes as a 'multi-level career path with a clearly defined promotion policy based on equity and merit' (MOEYS, 2003) may also be an attraction, 'with appropriate incentives and rewards to those who remain in service' (ibid., p.31).

The District Sponsorship scheme is a strategy for improving teacher deployment - a scheme where teacher trainees are sponsored by Districts and the students are contracted to teach in these districts for at least three years upon completion of their training. Another challenge in deploying teachers is that many students entered teacher training colleges with the intention of accessing the study leave programme in order to get into tertiary education and then leave the education service. As well as incurring significant administrative and management costs, this is a highly cost ineffective means of producing graduates. Addressing this, the Untrained Teachers Training Programme (UTT) focuses on the needs of poor untrained teachers and as such represents a strong pro-active government intervention. About 14,300 untrained teachers in the northern and middle parts of the country have been registered and enrolled on the programme since 2004 (Baiden-Amisshah, 2006).

Professional development for 190,000 teachers and their senior learners is the major challenge. Meeting the goals of Education For All requires as a priority addressing the recruitment and qualifications shortfall. The 2003-2015 goals include volunteer teacher programmes in rural areas with an emphasis on local recruitment, especially of women, together with 'deprived area incentive packages' which include teacher accommodation, transport and services. The programme promised a review of policies and procedures for promotion, discipline and staff development, placing a greater emphasis on distance education as a means of professional development. The policy on study leave which allows teachers leave for further study and improved qualifications would also be reviewed so as to reduce the number of teachers on study leave annually, a significant financial burden and one that saw large numbers of teachers leaving the service thereafter.

The Best Teacher/Worker Award scheme was instituted to celebrate good teaching and to acknowledge the important role teachers play in the development of the society. In presenting the awards in April 2010 Acting Regional Director (Upper East) Mrs. Atagabe appealed to all the municipal and district assemblies to find innovative ways to keep the Best Teacher/Worker Award scheme alive and feasible. At that event 90 teaching and non-teaching staff of education received, as an accompaniment to the Certificate of Award, TV sets, deep freezers, and fans (Allafrica.com16 April 2010). Such events are only sustainable by a

combination of government funding, District Assembly support and contributions from UNICEF and other donor agencies.

Education for All

The National Action Plan: Education for All was launched in 2003 with an ambitious plan to be realised by the year 2015. The four focal areas were defined as Equitable Access, Quality of Education, Educational Management, Science and Technology Education and Training. These were set within wider government policies on economy, health and welfare contained in the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy. These policy goals are:

- Increase Access to and Participation in Education and Training
- Improve Quality of Teaching and Learning for Enhanced Pupil/Student Achievement
- Extend and improve Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- Promote Good Health and Environmental Sanitation in Schools and Institutions of Higher Learning
- Strengthen and Improve Educational Planning and Management
- Promote and Extend the Provision of Science and Technology Education and Training
- Promote and Extend Pre-school Education
- Identify and promote education programmes that will assist in the prevention of HIV/AIDS
- Provide females with equal opportunities to access the full cycle of education

These are translated into specific policy objectives, indicative targets (outputs and outcomes), strategies and activities, time frames, agencies responsible and collaborating departments within the Ministry and accompanied by line management and accountability measures. Monitoring mechanisms and accountability measures encompass performance appraisal and institutional performance reviews for management at ministry, agency, regional, district, school and institutional levels. They also include 'annual headcounts to ensure accuracy in the payroll of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and its agencies' (with an emphasis on removing ghost names), (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2003, p.21).

With approximately 10% of its work force being high school or college graduates, Ghana, like most African countries, continues to struggle to bridge traditional literacy and computer literacy. In terms of traditional literacy, the most recent research places Ghana's youth (ages 15–24) literacy rate at 70.7% and its adult (ages 15+) literacy rate at 57.9% (Ford, 2007).

Such statistics have prompted Ghana to take some important steps to make education and information accessible to its citizens. With basic education in Ghana now tuition free, the

Ghanaian government sees the key to educating all its people as through technology. The government believes that the digital divide is not just about hardware and software but more about how the educational system can exploit the knowledge revolution to develop the skills that children and young people need in a knowledge economy. Africa has been referred to as the continent that 'suffers the most from ... the digital divide in a world that has increasingly become wholly based on knowledge' (Olowu, 2004, p.81).

In fact, in 1995, Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African nation to have "full Internet connectivity," a service that provides users complete Internet access along with one or more static public addresses (The Internet Society, 2004). In the last few years, the Internet, wireless technology, and freer radio broadcasts have vastly expanded communications and information in Ghana.

The government, conscious of its obligations to provide quality education for its citizens, believes such education can be achieved through ICT (Yankson, 2006). 'The Ghanaian government is committed to the deployment of requisite tools and strategies to achieve the broad goal of every Ghanaian learner to be able to use ICTs confidently and creatively by 2015 because of the present information society and the global knowledge economy' (Yankson, 2006). To make this possible, the government signed an agreement with the ICT Education for Africa (IESA) Foundation for 70,000 refurbished computers for schools from 2006 to 2010 (Yankson, 2006). Furthermore, the Ghanaian Ministry of Communications (2006) with Intel and Deon 2000 are making computers affordable for teachers and other government employees.

In partnership with the British government, the Ghanaian government has constructed science centers equipped with computers at 108 of Ghana's 477 secondary schools, but maintaining these centers has been difficult because of insufficient funds to maintain the equipment and a lack of teachers qualified to teach with computers. Many teachers, who gain on-the-job computer training to teach in public schools quit for more rewarding positions outside of the school system (Zehr, 2004).

There is an irony in the juxtaposition of the rapidly improving virtual highway and the highway on the ground. Ford (2007) writes that the road between the two largest urban conurbations, Kumasi and Accra, where the bulk of technological businesses exist, is in a bad state of repair. As result the trip takes five or more hours whereas, with better roads, travel time would be about two and a half hours.

The leadership challenge

Education reform in Ghana has ignored the importance of leadership development for headteachers (Zame, Hope and Respress, 2008, p.117). While this statement may be rebutted by evidence of programmes in various places in the country, the vast majority of headteachers do accede to, and tend to remain in, their positions without the benefit of professional development.

The Zame et al, survey of 224 heads in the greater Accra region reported 29% as having some form of training with the predominating emphasis being on what might be described as maintenance tasks. 50% of headteachers ranked 'managing and organizing the school day to day functions' as the primary proficiency required of a head. Assessing pupil performance was given pride of last place out of ten competencies practised by headteachers in Basic schools with only 1.8% citing it as current practice. While questionnaire items such as this are open to differing interpretation there is, nonetheless, consistent evidence as to the primarily office-bound administrative role of Ghanaian heads.

Outlining the findings of the Edqual study (March 2009, Myjoyonline.com) Oduro reported that 76% of heads interviewed had little or no training and that leadership strategies tended to be largely trial and error. He said that many heads did not regard themselves as leaders but as custodians of school properties and implementers of government policies. This echoes an earlier study by Oduro (2003) in which he described heads as performing a range of duties such as supervising the cleaning and tidying of the school campus, monitoring the hygiene of vendors who come on to the school compound, inspecting building projects, attending to risks and injuries and illness among staff as well as pupils.

Oduro, by evidence from his 2008 study found, in the three districts which he examined, a high level of headteacher absenteeism, in fact higher than that of teachers. He also found that 82% of teacher absenteeism could be accounted for by ill health and attending funerals with another 40% due to in-service distance lectures.

There was, Oduro concluded, an urgent need for intervention strategies which would equip school leaders with strategic approaches to professional development and classroom pedagogy. Akyeampong (2006) describes whole school development workshops targeted at headteachers offering training in how to develop a Whole School Action Plan including target setting and appraisal, designing and preparing school budgets. These take the form of cluster in-service workshops in which teachers from five to eight schools form a single school-based in-

service unit working in close collaboration with a District Teacher Support Team (DTST). The purpose is to identify common unsolved problems relating to teaching and learning with DTST's and headteachers acting as resource personnel. Where solutions to problems are beyond the expertise of head teachers and the DTST's, other cluster centres are to be approached for assistance.

The Whole School Development (WSD) Programme, designed to address leadership issues, has been supported by the Teacher Education Division (TED) of Ghana Education Service involving the training of 2,200 headteachers and 1,100 District Teacher Support Teams (DTSTs) in primary practices in literacy, numeracy, problem solving and preparation of teaching/learning materials. Headteachers have also been trained in the use of performance appraisal instruments. In alliance with NGOs and other development partners there has been a concerted push to provide training in the promotion of management efficiency for DTSTs, Zonal co-ordinators and circuit supervisions (GES WSD Report 2004). The 2004 Report noted that due to the efforts of WSD more headteachers and circuit supervisors than before, were now sitting in teachers' classes discussing with them their lesson plans, looking at samples of students' work, and discussing with teachers their career development. The quality, scope and distribution of leadership is now high on the policy priority agenda.

In summary

Ghana is a country characterised by diversity and inequitable distribution of resources and wealth, a consequence of population migrations, religious influence and colonial economic policy.

A process of continuing reform, driven largely by donor agencies, brings with it Western assumptions and a Western model of schooling; ill suited to the social and economic needs of communities and the country.

The impact of decentralisation policies has a destabilising effect on communities whose leaders, parents and community members lack experience and requisite expertise in the running of schools.

There are tensions, often irreconcilable, between the horizontal (collegial and capacity building) purposes of an education system and its vertical (distancing and individualistic) functions.

Conditions for learning in many parts of the country are such that pupils may have no learning resources within their schools and face conditions within the home that militate against homework or home study.

Inflexibility in school routines, protocols and starting times creates problems for households where children, particularly girls, are required to share in family tasks. When school is a long distance from the community girls are less likely than their brothers to be sacrificed to the cause of schooling.

In recognition of the digital divide the government takes as a policy priority the need to develop the skills that children and young people need in a knowledge economy.

Colonialisation and the influence of external donor agencies are reflected in what is widely acknowledged as a cumbersome and inappropriate curriculum. A consequence is lack of engagement by pupils, low levels of achievement and, on parents' part a weighing of opportunity costs to the domestic economy.

The pull of cities and migration from north to south exposes young people to exploitation, abuse and criminalisation, often from the very individuals employed to protect them.

Girls and young women face particular risks from urban predators buying or requiring sexual favours and unwilling to use condoms, so raising HIV risks and illegal abortions.

A major constraint militating against girls' access and achievement is the low presence of female teachers in deprived rural areas, exacerbated by the GES' reluctance to post women to areas where they would be 'handicapped or fall victim to local chiefs or rich farmers who wanted to take them as their second wife'.

There are tensions and dilemmas experienced by teachers living in communities in which their professional status may be an obstacle as well as an advantage. Their vulnerability to rumour and opposition requires them to observe the highest standards of ethical conduct.

Review and revision of teaching materials, new measures on teacher incentives, and a focus on in-service professional development, while policy priorities in the 2007 Education Reform Act, will have to address the problems of teacher exodus and study leave creating a vacuum into which unqualified and untrained teachers flow.

Rapid educational expansion de-linked from economic opportunity results in unskilled labour becoming more attractive to employers, in spite of the greater availability of skilled labour, in an inflationary cycle that devalues educational credentials and increases difficulty for the poorest in accessing the educational route out of poverty.

Effective leadership programmes need to challenge headteachers to give priority to professional development and observation of classroom practice while attending, with discrimination, to myriad demands from district offices and the local community.

Capacity building programmes have focused on building and strengthening community agencies, networks and their relationship with schools. Partnership, advocacy and continuing support for parents, SMCs and community leaders exemplify what can be achieved in small-scale interventions. The engagement of district managers and circuit supervisors will be critical in the development and transformation process.

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