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# **BARRIERS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION IN GHANA**

by  
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## BARRIERS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION IN GHANA

“Try to image every school-age child in Europe and North America and multiply that by two. The total approximates the number of children in the developing world who either never attended school or who start but dropout before finishing.”(Oxfam 1999:1). A child in Ghana, West Africa is more likely to work alongside his or her parents in the fields or in the market than to be enrolled in school. “This grim fact reminds us of the intertwined nature of poverty and education in relation to a child’s life chances” (Buchmann forthcoming:1). According to Buchmann, in comparison to all other world regions, sub-Saharan Africa is striking in two respects: its high level of absolute poverty and the recent decline in primary enrollment rates across the region decline to their lowest in fifteen years. No other region in the world has experienced such a setback.

Through the Black American Studies department’s study abroad program to Ghana at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, I had the opportunity to witness the effects of this setback first-hand. With the aid of the Chancellor’s Undergraduate Research Activity Award and my faculty advisor, Dr. Kathryn B. Ward in Sociology, I conducted extensive research and fieldwork on the various barriers to education for girls relative to boys.

To prepare myself for my research and fieldwork experience, I interviewed Ghanaian students at my university. The students helped me gain confidence in my interviewing and gave me an introduction to the Ghanaian culture. From my fellow students, I learned that the education of girls and women is central to Ghana’s economic development, their access to education, and family planning. Despite females outnumbering males in Ghana, fewer girls than boys are enrolled in school; and those who

are enrolled generally performed at a lower standard. Several factors such as poverty, traditional/cultural beliefs, and traditional gender roles have stood in the way of Ghanaian female's access to education.

Traditional beliefs cause parents to value sons more than daughters. According to Antoinette Ananni-Akoller(1999), a SIUC graduate student, she remembers being one of five or six girl in a class of 24. Many girls engage in extensive household chores, work in the markets alongside their mothers, and care for younger siblings, while their brothers attend school, study, and play. As a result, if parents have to choose between educating their daughter or son, they will more than likely chose their son who will have access to civil service work compared to the agricultural and informal economy work of his sister.

Gender-biased curricula in schools train women to be western-style housewives, petty traders, and farmers rather than scientists, professionals, and civil service workers. Many girls lack role models and supportive teachers to guide them to higher achievement. Many of them are the first females in their immediate families to attend school and most of their teachers are male. Although they attend school, girls are still expected to "perform their everyday family duties such as laundry, cooking, and selling goods in the market"(Ananni-Akoller, 1999).

By going into the homes of families from various regions and backgrounds, visiting schools to talk with teachers, students, and school officials, and collecting newspaper articles, I gained a better understanding of the education system in Ghana, especially the current situation and barriers to female education. An intricate relationship exists between poverty and education that makes finding a solution to low enrollment rates, especially for girl children, virtually impossible.

In the following sections, based on my research and fieldwork, I discuss the current situation of the education system, barriers to females' access to education, the level of participation of girls, FCUBE, school facilities and environment, poverty, the role of the family, and child labor. I will also discuss illiteracy, debt servicing, and inequalities between the urban and rural regions. I conclude with a discussion of what has and can be done to drastically reduce illiteracy and make high quality universal primary education a reality for all the children of Ghana by the year 2020. One should gain a deeper understanding of how poverty, education, and culture interrelate to determine a child's life chances in Ghana.

### **In the Beginning...**

Before the British arrived, there was no formal education system. Education was passed on from parents to their children. Mothers taught their daughters and fathers taught their sons. At the time formal education was introduced into Ghanaian society, only males were allowed to go to school. The British knew the only sure way to keep a nation of people dependent, stagnant, and subservient was to deny women, the sheer backbone of society, formal education. This guaranteed future generations of powerless individuals.

As I spoke with Nana Kwame, the son of a chief whose village I visited, I could hear the pain in voice as he talked about his mother and how she was unable to attend school because of traditions her family practiced that date back many years. He could remember his mother being very hard on him about his performance in school. Realizing that it was his only chance of pulling the family out of economic hardship, she instilled in Kwame the importance of an education at an early age.

Many parents believed that girls had to take care of the home and provide money for the family, therefore, they had to go out and do work in the markets and fields to sustain the family. According to traditional beliefs, men were the sole supporters of the family, and only they needed formal education. British colonial officials forced Ghanaians to adopt an idea that girls did not need schooling to be a good mother and wife, and that their place was ultimately in the home. Any education they needed to perform those two roles would be obtained through informal education.

Outside the home, both urban and rural women did most of the farming and trading. Many Ghanaians feel that the failure to educate girls when the formal education system was originally put into place has much to do with the country's current conditions. Despite Ghana's colonial legacy, the country made significant progress in the development of education during its history as an independent country.

In 1957, Ghana became the first African colony to gain independence from Great Britain. Under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumrah, Ghanaians enjoyed a stable economy and an education system it was known for across the continent of Africa. But despite its early prosperity in the early 1960s, Ghana faced difficult economic times in the 1970s and 80s due to "plunging trade terms, a drought, forced repatriation to nearly a million Ghanaians from Nigeria, shortages of fuel, and a weakened internal transportation system"(USAID 1997). In an effort to put Ghana's economy back on track, in the 1980s the government launched several "economic reform programs" that led to Ghana's accumulation of millions of dollars in loans. Accepting more loans than it needed and the mismanagement of funds, led to Ghana's debt crisis. In an effort to solve economic problems and bring the country out of debt, Ghana needed more financial assistance from

outside sources in the form of loans. Since most industrialized countries would only provide further assistance to countries cleared by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and Work Bank, Ghana had to agree to structural adjustment.

According to Bandarage, structural adjustment is “a set of free market economic policies imposed on countries by the IMF and the World Bank as a condition for receiving assistance”, typically in response to debt and worsening social crisis. “Adjustment loans come with stringent conditionalities” including “trade liberalization, export promotion, devaluation of local currency, curbs on import substitution industries, privatization of state controls, wage and salary freezes in public sector, and cutbacks on state and social welfare expenditures.”(Bandarage 1998:199). The latter hurts women and children most because education and healthcare are typically the primary social expenditures cut first. These are services females already have limited access to.

Ghana spent 3.6% in 1980, 6.4% in 1990, and 7.6% in 1996 of its GNP on debt service. Meanwhile, the country could only spend 2.6% and 1.7% of the GNP on education and health, respectively in 1980-90. The long-term debt almost tripled between 1980 and 1990 where from \$1.16 billion to \$2.8 billion, and doubled again to \$5.0 billion in 1996. The percentage of long-term debt owed to multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and IMF went from 24% in 1980 to 66% in 1990 and slightly declined to 63% in 1996. Due to structural adjustment and the IMF and World Bank being paid first, Ghana has had to pay increasing amounts of its GNP toward debt service and a minuscule amount on education. In sum, Ghana has experienced a net capital outflow: for every dollar received in aid, Ghana must pay \$2.15 dollars in debt service (Jubilee2000UK2000).

Instead of reducing debt, structural adjustment programs led to debt increase and further setback women. Unfortunately, with corrupt leaders and governing bodies and one unsuccessful reform after another, Ghana has never seen the type of prosperity it once enjoyed immediately after independence.

A crucial aspect of the economic recovery programs were the changes made to the education system. Economic hardships led to the deterioration of the Ghanaian education system's quality and standards. The government reduced primary, junior, and senior education from 17 to 12 years and planned to "increase the involvement of the family and community in funding and female access issues"(USAID 1997). From then on, most reforms geared toward improving education in Ghana involve placing more and more of the responsibility of funding on parents and communities and ways to increase female enrollment and performance levels.

The Ghanaian government has developed several reforms in an effort to improve the education system and the participation of girls. However, the current level of female participation and the system's quality leaves much to be desired. Even though females out-number males in Ghana, fewer girls are enrolled in school, more girls than boys drop out of school, and their transition to higher levels and achievement rates are very low.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here.

These statistics reflect the real situation of girls' and boys' education. According to Table 1, girls lag behind boys in overall admission rates from 1981 to 1992 at 75.94% versus 84.43% in 1992. Gender disparity also occurs at regional levels (Table 2). While most of the regions have attained enrollment rates well above the national average, three

regions in the North have enrollment rates below this average. These regions have strong religious and socio-economic factors that do not favor girls' education, which will be discussed later. Among the three regions with low enrollment in the northern part of Ghana, the Northern region has the lowest enrollment, which can be attributed to dire poverty, conflict over limited resources, territorial lines, religion, and varying cultures.

#### Insert Tables 3 and 4 About Here

Girls constitute about 40% of the student population at the Junior Secondary School (JSS) level, which is a decrease from the primary level. The enrollment of boys and girls remained relatively steady from 1986 to 1995. The national average of girls attending Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) is 32.4. In the northern regions, the national admission rates for girls are only two- thirds of the national average.

Even though the barriers to education for girls have been generally identified, the situation has not changed much over time. Various attempts have been made to deal with the problem of girls' low enrollment and the high dropout rate. What I found most disappointing is how the percentage of girls in school declines as one climbs the ladder to the university level, and particularly for girls in math and science related programs.

#### Constraints on Female Participation

What are the causes of low enrollment and high dropout rate of girls in schools? The *Girls' Education Unit* (1998) was established in February 1997 within the *Basic Education Division* of the *Ghana Education Service*. The Unit is responsible for all matters relating to the education of the girls in Ghana. The Unit is seen as a step in the right direction to ensure that girls, who are the future mothers and managers of domestic economy, are well educated and empowered. According to Peter Mensah, Director of the

KEEA District Assemble of Education, students, parents, teachers, school officials, and other sources, the following were suggested as causes of low enrollment and retention of girls in KEEA district schools:

- Economic Constraints- Contrary to government official and the Ministry of Education, parents are unable, not unwillingness, to sent their children to school. The vast majority of girls must work in order to pay school fees and contribute to the family.
- Small and scattered settlements resulting in long distances between homes and schools- Parents realize that it is unsafe to let their girls walk long periods of time unsupervised. Also, the time that it takes for them to get there and back is precious time away from household chores, trading in the market, and work on the farm.
- Teenage Pregnancy- Half of all women in Ghana have their first child before the age of 20. Teenage pregnancy results in high drop-out rates among girls.
- Lack of role models in the classrooms and at home- Many girls are the first female in their village to attend school. This is especially the case in the more remote, northern regions. Most of their parents never attended school and the majority of the teachers are male.
- Unattractive school environment/ poor infrastructure- Poor, if any, learning materials, crumbling schools, lack of furniture and separate toilet facilities keep girls from wanting to attend school.
- Traditional beliefs- Many parents feel money invested in girls' education is money wasted since their roles are to procreate and remain in the kitchen.
- Gender stereotyping both at school and at home- at school, girls are considered less intelligent than boys and the textbooks testify to this. Girls do household chores while their brothers are out playing.
- Overburdening girls with household chores- There is little time for school and homework with the amount of work around the house and in the market.
- Sexual Harassment by classmates, male teachers, and males in general oftentimes result in pregnancy and high dropout rates- Male teachers threaten, humiliate, harass, abuse, rape, and tease girls, causing them to remain silence in class or avoid coming altogether.

- Girls' own expectation and motivation. Both male and female students have low expectations of female achievements in school and career prospects. The girls themselves feel they do not have the intellectual ability to perform on the same level.

From my observations, child labor, household chores, and cultural barriers affect girls' access to education the most. The long hours children must work impair their intellectual development. It is unreasonable to think that children can learn while they are physically exhausted and mentally tired. For many children, hours spent in school become a time for resting, not learning.

Since girls are responsible for the vast majority of household chores, little time is set aside for school and homework. When the two become too much to juggle, school is last priority. In Ethiopia, a "survey found that girls out of school were working 14-16 hours a day (Oxfam 1999 ch.4-1 p.). This is also the case in Ghana. Even with classes being run in shifts (Shift A 8-12:15, Shift B 12:45-5), household chores are still too time consuming for many girls to attend school.

Even though many of the traditional beliefs about educating girls are fading with time, in areas in northern Ghana where old traditions reign supreme, many girls face cultural discrimination. From birth, these girls' life chances are limited. Very few of them ever leave their village, crippling their awareness of anything other than the "old ways". The cultural practice of early marriage places another important restriction on girls' educational opportunities. In the poorer areas of Ghana where many girls start school late, early marriage and pregnancy cut short an already brief education.

Despite the above, the Ministry of Education argues that the number of girls in school is dramatically increasing with the fading of traditional beliefs about educating girls. With communities and parents becoming more aware of the need to educate both

girls and boys, more girls are going to school, but their numbers remain extremely low relative to boys. According to the government, free, compulsory, and universal basic education (FCUBE) program was set up to improve this.

### **Government Initiatives: FCUBE**

The Free Compulsory and University Basic Education Program, commonly known as **FCUBE**, was developed in 1995 and launched in 1996 to provide quality basic education for all children. The target of the program is to make progressive improvements in all aspects of the education system that will lead to substantive changes in the quality of teaching and learning in all basic schools in Ghana. According to the Ministry of Education, the goal of the **FCUBE** program is to provide an opportunity for *every* child of school age in Ghana to receive good quality basic education by the year 2005 and:

- To improve quality teaching and learning
- To improve management efficiency
- Increase enrollment of girls in basic education to equal that of boys
- Reduce the drop-out rate of girls from 40% to 10%
- Increase the transition rate of girls from basic education to senior secondary from 30% to 50%
- Expose ten thousand girls from basic and senior secondary schools to the STME clinics and hope that at least 30% to 35% of girls would choose science as an elective at the senior secondary school level.

(MOE 1999a [http://www.ghana.edu.gh/ges\\_fcube.htm](http://www.ghana.edu.gh/ges_fcube.htm))

Instead of improving quality, standards, performance, management, and increase access and participation, FCUBE has done the very opposite.

### **Low Performance in Schools**

According to the Ministry of Education (1999b), performance of students in basic schools has been a matter of serious concern to the government and the public who look

upon an effective basic education as the child's first steps toward further training, toward a good job an eventual success in life.

Before and after the implementation of FCUBE, performance of public schools on standardized test and in the classroom rose slightly, but is remains extremely low and well below performance levels that may be considered cost effective given the resources provided. What then could be the reasons for this low level of performance?

According to the Ministry of Education (1999b) students' performance has been negatively affected by three factors. First, Ghana has experienced massive expansion of its educational services. Between 1986-1997, the number of schools increased by 19% (from 14,557 to 17,372). School enrollments for basic schools increased 23% (from 2.2 to 2.8 million). Second, the population growth rate of 3% challenges available facilities and resources for education. Unfortunately, with the increase in students there has been little to no increase in resources for more books, supplies, and classroom furniture, further hindering the ability of teachers to provide quality education. Third, the Ministry of Education blames high teacher absenteeism for low performance of students and lax management of schools by administrators. The role and plight of teachers will be discussed in-depth later in this paper.

The Ministry fails to point out several key barriers to the effective implementation of FCUBE. First, with the steady increase in student enrollment, there has been little to no increase in facilities and teachers. Facilities are already in short supply, which explains why teachers are forced to run the schools in shifts. This leaves an insufficient time for mastering a large amount of course subjects. This contributes to why students are not performing on a standard level. Even with more students enrolled in school, the

ultimate goal of the program, there is no place and not enough teachers to educate these students

Secondly, most parents can not keep up with the mounting cost of education. Besides uniforms, paper, and pencils, etc, it is becoming more and more common for teachers, the PTA, and other organizations to impose their own fees for various things such as exams, maintenance, and registration. The more cuts made to the education budget the more fees imposed on parents. They just simply can not keep up, leaving them with no choice other than pulling their children out of school.

### The Reality of FCUBE for Parents

The real goal of the FCUBE program is to place the burden of funding education on parents and the community and allow the government to get away from fulfilling its responsibility of educating its people. Like most African countries, the high debt service load in Ghana has made education less and less of a priority (Buchmann 1996; Oxfam Education Now Campaign 1999). Despite the claims of the Ministry of Education, the government does not plan to reallocate more of the annual budget toward basic education, because it is virtually impossible with the current situation of the economy. Most schools can not get the government to supply chalk. Instead, the government continues to cut the budgets for education and health, ultimately affecting girls and women the most. A female elder of a family I visited often during my stay in Ghana stated that “women must take care of themselves. If we are sick, the whole family goes hungry. If I get sick, I still work”. Women and females make up about 30% of those who benefit from health care services.

The government was able to convince citizens to buy into the FCUBE program by calling it “free”. The program is all but free. The only reason it is referred to as “free” is because there is no tuition to attend public schools. Parents are responsible for various school fees and must buy books, supplies, uniforms, and many times, the school furniture or even the school bus. In place of tuition are recreation fees, school facility fees, and water tank fees.

I had the opportunity to speak with Angelina Baidoo of the Sanka clan in Elmina. When I asked her how she felt about the FCUBE program, she replied:

It is not free....nothing is free. The parents have to pay. It once was a time when the children had to help on the farms, so few could attend school. When parents heard of the FCUBE program, they quickly enrolled their children only to find out later the enormous fees they were expected to pay. Many in this village (Sanka) were forced to pull their wards from the classrooms.

Like many women in Ghana, Angelina understands the importance of getting a formal education because she herself had the opportunity and wants the same for her children. She said it cost about 51,000 cedis (the equivalent roughly of \$20 U.S. dollars) per term to send two of her children to school. She finds it difficult to come up with the money with her income as a baker, considering a loaf of bread sells from 300-1,000 cedis.

The introduction of school fees has led to a decline in school enrollment. Many parents can not afford to send their children to school. Furthermore, district authorities and Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), which now have more responsibility for education, have imposed their own additional charges, which many parents simply cannot afford. Angelina said that each term a new fee is required for attendance, after a while

they just become too much for many families. This explains why so many students start but eventually drop out of school.

### The Role of the PTAs

There is a dangerous trend of PTAs becoming the sole provider of any and everything the schools need as the government continues to cut funds allocated for education. In the beginning, Parent Teacher Associations' main reason for existence was to support schools and students. Now PTAs are looked on to purchase school buses, water-tanks, and classroom furniture causing the associations' bills to become unbearable. These additional bills are such that most parents wonder if the aims of the PTAs have gone from finding ways of making the teacher more comfortable to teach to satisfying the personal demands of some people (Turkson 1999 p.7)). I argue that PTAs and NGOs (non-governmental organizations) should have some responsibility for *aiding* in the financing of education for the children in Ghana, not taking on the brunt of the financing. What they should be responsible for is creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning. As the government places the burden of funding education elsewhere, the responsibility is ultimately placed on parents and children.

### Opportunity and Direct Cost to Parents and Families

As Ghana transforms its education system from public to private, households absorb most of the cost. The Ministry of Education sees the 4,500-5,000 cedis (\$1) for school fees to be extremely meager. This amount for five or six children is all but meager to a poor family. Poor families endure direct and opportunity cost when sending their children to school. Direct costs are the actual funds (out-of-pocket) spent on

education, whereas, opportunity cost would things less obvious such as time and effort spent in school that would otherwise be put into money-generating activities.

There are “official fees imposed by the government for exam fees, levies imposed by schools and PTAs for registration, school-improvement, unofficial fees charges by schools as ‘informal’ payments to teachers, out-of-pocket payments for uniforms, textbooks, pencils, transportation, and community imposed fees for school construction and maintenance”(Oxfam 1999:1). With so many fees constantly being added, households can not keep up.

“When children go to school, their parents incur more than financial costs. The time and effort children would otherwise devote to household chores, production, or other income generating activities is lost. These opportunity costs are often high for poor households because they are more heavily reliant on child labor and higher for girls than boys because of gender inequalities in the division of labor. Also, where school quality is deteriorating or cost are rising...it tends to be girls who are withdrawn first, reflecting a view that the education of girls is less important than that of boys.”(Oxfam 1999ch.4-3:6).

### **Facilities, Teaching Environment, and Curricula**

Despite the economic hardships Ghanaians face, they survive and make do with what they have. This is surely the case when it comes to the education system. The teachers are expected to teach tired, hungry, and sleepy children who have been up working at least three hours before class begins, those that have walked several miles to get to class, and student that arrive without the necessary school supplies to keep up with the others.

There are few exams that test students' progress so students who should be learning on higher levels and vice versa are in the same class, leaving many students with untapped knowledge and abilities. As for exams, parents have to pay for the paper the tests are printed on. What we think of as absurd is the daily life of children in all of sub-Saharan Africa. But the teachers and students manage. They work with what they have.

The classes rarely have enough desks and chairs for every student. Many have to stand, sit on the floor, or lie on their bellies. It takes a mere \$20,000 American dollars to build and furnish a six-classroom school (price of land included). Most of the time there is no chalk or paper. Most school "bathrooms" are a stack of bricks with the gender written on the outside in chalk. This is clearly not an environment conducive to teaching and learning. Many schools have to deny admission to students because they don't have enough adequate classrooms for the children.

This was the situation in the Ho Mawuli School described in the *Ghanaian Times* (1999 p.11). According to the article, the school will be forced to reduce admissions next year by 40%, after admissions had already been reduced by 50% four years ago because of inadequate classrooms. The headmaster of the school Mr. F.R.K. Degbor, said "the school has 1,394 students with only 29 classroom units. We have converted the lounge areas of some of the dormitory blocks into classrooms because the roofs are leaking and the windows are falling apart". The school was built in the late 1950s with its only renovations in 1986. These problems are compounded by the deteriorating and unsafe road that lead to the school.

Gender biased curriculum and violence against girls also have affected education. When the first schools were established under the colonial masters, enrollment was

reserved for boys. This created a notion that women and girls did not need to be formally educated, but in the kitchen and in the fields. This notion has plagued Ghana and so many African countries to this day. Girls are led to believe they are not smart enough to do well in the sciences, math, and business classes, so they stick with liberal arts because it is supposedly easier for them. The power of culture is very strong. You can look at the girl students and tell a huge difference between how they behave and the behavior of the boys. They do not raise their hands to ask questions. They shy away from male teachers. They automatically assume math and science are too hard because they are taught that boys do better in these subjects. I asked a group of girls, all juniors and seniors in Tamale, why none of them chose science or math as their specialized course and all replied the courses were too hard. I asked them how did they know this and each told me that was what their teachers told them.

Girls are daily targets of rape and assault. They are not safe at home nor at school. They are not safe before, during, or after school. They read about girls their age being assaulted daily in the newspaper, but never hear of arrests or convictions. Many never speak up for fear they will be accused of tempting those who assault them or tarnishing the family name.

There was a case when a 22- year old teacher lured a young girl to his house after school where he offered her candy and toys. After raping her, he told her not to tell anyone and she did so in fear that he'd kill her. As I was leaving the city of Kumasi, I witnessed a large crowd of mothers and students marching through the market area protesting. After talking with a couple of students, I learned the community was outraged because a young girl was raped by a man who had previously raped another young girl

just a week prior to this incident. Had he been arrested, this terrible crime would have never been committed. What message does this send to thousands of young girls in Ghana? “Nowhere is safe alone and you can’t trust anyone” is the response of many. Female teachers are also vulnerable.

### The Plight of Teachers

The teachers are in a very disturbing situation in Ghana. Their modest pay is not nearly enough to take care of them. They must supplement their income by tutoring students whose parents can afford it and selling at the market. A teacher I met by the name of Ann Tema who taught at the D.C. school in Elmina and sold perfume after class to buy food and pay her debts at the end of the month. Most teachers must do the same.

Despite the poor pay, she loves teaching. She sees the potential her students possess, but are unable to reach that ultimate potential due to their inability to buy books and inconsistent attendance. Ms. Tema introduced me to a young boy named Richard who was extremely intelligent for his age. This young man was able to explain to me how the economy effected his family and how waste in the water caused kids his age to develop leg sores. Sadly, his father was unable to send him to a private boarding school in Takrodi that would best suit him. Despite the private school being the best place for him, the money his family would loose from his work at the market would affect everyone since his father was in between jobs. Ms. Tema, feeling she was doing Richard an injustice by having him in her class, let him learn from her teachers’ manual.

There are millions of Ms. Temas in Ghana. There are many teachers who love teaching, but can not continue doing so because of the pay and the stress that comes along with it. Teachers are expected to teach between 8 and 10 subjects, thirty minutes

each. Typically, there is one book for every twenty children. It is unrealistic to expect teachers to get their students ready for term exams under these conditions.

During my stay in Elmina, I met a young male teacher by the name of Teophilus. He explained to me how he had always dreamed of becoming a teacher. Sadly, after teaching just one year, he would be returning to school to take up another trade. I could hear the frustration in his tone over the FCUBE program. “Why are there no books for my students? There are plenty of books at St.Augustine (an expensive all-male private boarding school)”, he would say. He feels that the government is corrupt and are severely “detached from common, everyday people. I won’t teach again to the government starts treating us like humans”.

This is just one story of many about teachers that are forced to leave the jobs they love to find work that will put food on the table. These teachers really care for their students, and realize they may be replaced by someone that may not care for them as much.

Money is not the only factor forcing teachers out of classrooms, it is also harassment. With the rise in young crimes and delinquency, teachers are daily targets of bullies. Most times, they are students who have repeated grades several times and are much older than the other kids. When harassing students becomes boring, they turn to the teachers who are really young.

To increase enrollment in the northern regions of Ghana, the government developed incentive packages to be given to qualified teachers who were willing to relocate. Most packages include a bicycle, a relocation stipend, and a small increase in pay. Many teachers jumped at the chance to relocate, only to do so and find life much

harder. There is little to no communication, electricity, or mobile roads. Many times, the teacher would never receive their bicycles. With no way to get to and from work, they would stay home. With no real administration, teacher absenteeism goes unnoticed, ultimately hurting students. Unfortunately these are not issues addressed when there are talks of improving education.

### **Inequality and Poverty**

The bottom line surrounding access and participation in education is poverty increased by an overwhelming debt burden. It is the main reason the number of girls being educated relative to boys is so much lower. Ghana is a very poor, non-self-sustaining country due to the lingering influences of past colonial rule, high debt service payments, and a constant influx of corrupt government officials. More and more cuts are being made to public expenditures for debt servicing. Like most African countries, Ghana has paid most, if not all, of its original debt and will never realistically repay the amounts reported by the IMF and World Bank. For example, Ghana's debt stocks to exports ratio (DBTSTK/exports) is 349% and its debt service to exports ratio (DBTSER/exports) is 30%. According to the G-7 countries (the most economically powerful countries of the North), sustainable debt levels would be 200-250% and 20-25% respectively, while many countries have problems with levels of 150-200% and 15% (Jubilee2000UK 2000;Oxfam1999). Thus, Ghana has very few resources to generate jobs and/or fund education.

There are few salaried jobs and most people are fishermen, farmers, and petty traders. With an economy like this, child labor is vital for survival. The work children do is not considered child labor, but more like informal education. This same notion of

informal education and the importance placed on it by traditions and family customs is one of many barriers to the education of the girl child in Ghana.

It is easy to lay blame on the many European countries that savagely extracted all of Ghana's resources and manpower, leaving it in a position where the country can not run itself. The opportunity to better the country is there but virtually impossible with the current leaders in power. The president and ministers are content with their individual families living comfortably while their citizens barely have running water, electricity, a decent sewage system, and a proper waste disposal system. Thousands of dollars come up missing yearly, but no one is ever held accountable. What is to be done?

Even where schooling is free, the poor may not be able to pay for the uniforms, books, shoes, and other school supplies that their children must have in order to take advantage of "free" education. I can remember the makeshift school in the Sanka village of Elmina. None of the students wore uniforms and only the teacher had access to books. When I went to visit the school before I left, I found out that the teachers were actually parents who would take breaks from farming to try and teach their children from books donated to a Parent Teacher Association.

When poverty-stricken families can afford education, it is frequently of low quality. Sadly, they immediately remove their children with slightest increase in fees or when a decrease in quality is evident. Even more evident than the disparity between boys and girls' enrollment is the inequality between urban and rural communities. The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) found that poverty is the leading barrier to formal education in rural areas (1999b:4). Rural communities have the lowest number of students enrolled in school. The Ghana Education Service observes that potential

primary school students in rural areas have low enrollments because of their parents' inability to pay school fees.

More than 50% of children of school-going age in the Tamale Municipality are not in school. Female enrollment is very low because of an alarming dropout rate. According to a July 1999 issue of the *Ghanaian Times*, the situation is more pronounced in the rural schools of Tamale where there is a lack of schools, teachers, books, and furniture. Poverty, ignorance, and lack of commitment by both parents and teachers were also cited as reasons for the drop in enrollment.

According to the article, due to poverty, male children are often used as farm hands by their fathers while the females are sometimes withdrawn from school to perform household chores when they become a little advanced in age. Mr. Mohammed Alhassan Adam, the Tamale Municipal Chief Executive, was cited as saying "at the beginning of the second term of the 1998-99 academic year, a total of 14,978 children were enrolled in kindergarten, 44,000 at the primary level, 15,106 in the junior secondary school, 7,083 students were in senior secondary school, and 237 were in private school" (*Ghanaian Times* 1999:11). Mr. Adam described these figures as very discouraging and appealed to parents and guardians to help by taking the issue of educating their children seriously. He also urged government officials to enact measures to encourage female enrollment and retention. Even though parents are becoming more and more conscious of the importance of sending their child to school, this is no longer the problem. The problem is their inability to pay. Sadly enough, school officials find that hard to understand. Only a small few can afford to send their children to Wesley or St. Augustine, two of the best private schools in Africa. Both are roughly 350,000 to

400,000 cedis a term and there are three terms a year. One term costs more than one farmer's yearly salary.

The stress all this places on a family is unimaginable, but just as the students and teachers make due, so does the family.

### Families and Child Labor

The family is the most important aspect of Ghanaian society. The bonds among lineage are great and roles are very pronounced. Traditionally, women have been restricted to raising children and taking care of the home, while men are able to work in the formal sector. The roles of girls are the same as her mother. Daughters must do the majority of household chores in to relieve their mothers' workload. Men make most of the decisions for the family and rarely seek the advice and opinion of his wife, sadly, he teaches his son to do the same.

The situation of women in Ghana, like most African countries, is getting better. These women provide excellent examples of hard work and perseverance to their children, but most often, they can not provide an example when it comes to education because they themselves have not attended.

Parents are more and more conscious of the need to send their children to school, but because of their poor economic situation, they are unable to do so. They need their children alongside them in the market and in the fields to sustain the family. From speaking with many parents during my stay in Ghana, I could sense the regret parents felt because they had to put their children to work. It is hard for them to see their children too tired to eat or not getting proper rest, but it is simply the way things have to be with the current economic situation. Until something is done, children will continue to work.

## Child Labor

The fact that children are needed to work alongside their parents at the market or out in the fields has a tremendous impact on the education system. Like most children in sub-Saharan Africa, a child in Ghana is more likely to be selling ice water and catching fish than to be enrolled in school. Each day these children miss out on a full day of learning and growing because they *must* work. The work children do is not considered labor, but informal education. Some parents see this as a sufficient replacement of formal education because it has immediate returns of money. I was amazed to see the number of kids up at dawn in the market areas with their parents setting up shops. Most of them would be wearing school uniforms. I asked several students how long they'd stay at the markets before they went off to school. Many replied "until I have enough to pay my school fees" or "until class begins". I would later see these same students either still at the markets or sleeping in class several hours later. No child should be subject to these conditions, unfortunately the society they live in relies on their work.

Because the government has put the burden of funding school on the backs of the community and parents, selling at the markets are the only way a large majority of children are able to attend school. Ironically, their very means of attendance adversely affects their performance. .

Several things influence if and who parents send to school, such as whether or not the parents attended school and the number of children in a single household. Even though the fees are considered meager by government standards (4-5000 cedis), a family with five or more children could only dream of sending them all.

In an article from the *Ghanaian Times*, Lt.-Col. Lord Sarfo, District Chief Executive seemed to place the majority of the blame of child labor on parents when he stated: “The problem (of child labor) would come to an end when irresponsible parents assume their natural obligations towards their children and take full advantage of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) program in bringing them up.” What Mr. Sarfo fails to realize is that FCUBE is not “free” by any means. In all actuality, FCUBE is “free” because parents don’t have to pay tuition, but they are responsible for uniforms, books, and supplies. Fees from the PTA’s and districts are often imposed without the knowledge of the Ministry of Education.

I was curious as to how Ghanaians viewed child labor. As I was going through my newspaper clippings, I found several articles on child labor, how it is defined, and how parents, children, and society play a role in how child labor is perceived. In the May 22, 1999 issue of *Awake*(p.3), child labor was defined as “children who work long hours for low wages, often under conditions harmful to their health which is probably destructive or exploitative”. It is quite common to find children four or five years old who should be in school, selling in the market. Many girls are sent to the market areas or to homes to sell goods where they can be easily taken advantage of. This is highly exploitative, yet little is done to stop it

The Labor Decree of 1967, NLCD 157 Sec. 44 states: “No person shall employ a child except where the employment is with the child’s own family and involves work of a agricultural or domestic character only”. It is no wonder to me that so many children are roaming the market area and along the shore hawking goods (term for sell things) instead of in the classroom because provisions like the one above exist that says it is O.K. Does

“light work of domestic nature” include a child being sent off to sell ice water in the busy streets of downtown or girls sent to the homes of men unaccompanied where they are targets of rape and molestation? (*Awake* 1999:3)

If drastic steps are not taken by Government to protect the children of Ghana from overexploitation of their labor, then the country is heading for trouble because the streets are the breeding grounds for prostitution, armed robbers, drug pushers, just to mention a few (Oxfam 1999:1).

Some argue that the economy is to blame for the need to put children to work. Although there are laws that *sometimes* protect children from child labor, these laws cannot be properly enforced. Some of these abuses are a result of extreme poverty. Children have to work not only to survive, but contribute to the family’s survival. This is especially the case in the northern regions where poverty is at the highest level. For many families, the money children bring home is what keeps the family going. Under these circumstances, society may accept abuse in the form of child labor as justifiable. Parents and the government have to view educating children, boys and girls, as an investment.

As illustrated, there are many factors in play when one tries to rationalize the lack of quality education being provided for all school-going all children in Ghana, especially girls. Dire poverty, the debt crisis, structural adjustment, debt servicing, a lack of commitment from the government, and a severe mismanagement of funds continue to limit the number of children in school and further reduce the quality and standards of that education. Failed educational reforms, overburdening household chores, traditional/cultural beliefs, teen-age pregnancy, and the distance between settlements and school are among the never ending barriers to females access to education. Despite the necessity of

educating girls to improve the current and future situation in Ghana, not enough is being done on all levels to guarantee increased enrollment rates. Failing to do so leads to mass illiteracy.

### **The Agony of Illiteracy**

Illiteracy is one of the greatest afflictions of humanity at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has left hundreds of millions of people disadvantaged, vulnerable, and impoverished. It has the potential to destroy human potential on a scale unimaginable (Oxfam1999:1).

“Today, 125 million primary-school-age children are not in school, most of them are girls. Another 150 million children start primary school but drop out before they have completed four years of education, the vast majority before they have acquired basic literacy skills. One in four adults in the developing world-872 million people- are unable to read and write, and their numbers are growing”(Oxfam1999:1). Astonishing, as they may seem, these statistics understate the problem. Each year, illiteracy claims millions of new victims. Most of them are desperately poor young girls and women.

What are the costs of failing to educate this steadily increasing number of people, particularly girls and women? The most expensive price for not properly educating females in Ghana is the lost of productivity associated with their illiteracy. “A significant proportion of women are poorly educated or uneducated and therefore less able to provide needed services in the community”(FAWE1999:2) or maximize their potential. They are unable to actively participate in decision –making processes that affect them and their children.

There is no accurate percentage of illiterate adults in Ghana due to poor statistics and records, but it is safe to say that currently 76 percent of males and 54 percent of females can read and write. Women in Sub-saharan Africa are 60% more likely than men to be illiterate(Oxfam1999ch3:1). Because of the economic situation in Ghana, a quality education is out of reach for many, especially women and girls.

Education is the key to the future. Without educational funding, the human resources needed to drive social and economic recovery in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not exist. Without it, countries cannot realistically look forward to economic growth and stability. It is therefore a means to an end and not an end to itself. To deny a person the right to an education obstructs that individual's capacity to work productively to sustain and protect themselves and their families from poverty, hunger, child labor, and unemployment. To many, education is seen as expensive without immediate benefits. In all actually, illiteracy is more expensive than literacy. The expenses paid for an education is an investment that are often reaped several times fold through the ability of the educated to function effectively in society. Education also promotes an individual's self-esteem, raises his/her status on the social ladder, and increases his/her chances of acquiring a better standard of living. I can remember seeing kids in the market area in Elmina and Cape Coast and the first thing they would tell me what school they attended. Children in Ghana are aware of how hard an education is to come by because so few people around them have the opportunity.

Illiteracy is like a communicable disease, having the ability to spread and affect everyone in a family. Most uneducated people do not send their children to school because they see few immediate returns. Many parents feel their children are better off

on the farm, in the market, or in the house. This decision by an uneducated parent out of economic necessity stifles the child's advancement and opportunity of becoming a future leader. The child's intellectual abilities and talents, which would enable him/her to grow-up as a responsible adult, are denied along with normal growth and development.

At the same time, in all honesty, an education does not put food on the many tables of poor families in Ghana. Their children are needed in the market and in the fields so that everyone can eat. Unfortunately, poverty is constantly widening the gap between the educated and the uneducated in Ghana.

### **What Has And Needs To Be Done**

Although the number of boys and girls enrolled in school increased after the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) program was put into action, it has since decreased dramatically with the privatization of education. More of the responsibility for funding has been placed on parents and communities with already limited resources. As the Ghanaian government continues to cut the education budget and spend the majority of the country's GNP on debt repayment, citizens have little choice but to send their children out to the farms and markets to sustain the family. There is very little money to pay for the constantly increasing fees charged by teachers, school officials, PTAs, and many others. Combined with the barriers uniquely faced by girls, in the end, they are affected the most. Despite the bleak outlook for reaching the 2005 goal of educating all school-going age children in Ghana and fulfilling all the aims of FCUBE, people have not given up hope.

With the hard work of people like Peter Mensah, District Officer of the Assembly of Education Office, programs are still being set up to increase the enrollment of girls.

*The Girls Unit* (1998) has been put in charge of increasing participation of girls in the formal education system, especially in science and math related courses. The Science, Technology, and Mathematics Education (STME) Clinic for girls is a project aimed at increasing the enrollment of girls in primary education and their interest in courses, especially those in the field of science, math, and technology.

*The Girls Unit* active seeks ways to encourage parents to send their girls to school. They also work with teachers to keep “old ways of thinking” out of the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to treat girls and boys the same and provide them with role models. In addition to this, annual events where girls from secondary schools are exposed to the three subjects to sustain their interest are organized. Apart from exposing girls to SMTE subjects, the Clinic also strives to improve the methods teachers’ use when teaching these subjects to all students.

In a continuing effort to promote awareness of the importance of girls’ education throughout the country, the Unit publishes newsletters that are sent to parents, PTAs, non-for-profit organizations, and school officials. It is currently establishing a Female Education Scholarship Scheme (FESS) for girls whose families cannot afford the direct and opportunity cost of educating them. The scholarship will provide needy girls with uniforms, footwear, stationary, and stipend. However, all of these efforts only begin to address the long-term problems of providing education to children whose families have long traditions of illiteracy.

If the Ghanaian education system is to ever come to a point where it benefits the whole of society and quality free compulsory education will be accessible for all school-going age children, several things need to occur. First and foremost, there must be a

stronger commitment from the government in the form of funds and programs whose aims are improving the quality of education provided and enrollment of boys and girls.

In order for this to be done, cuts in the education budget must seize. Enough talk has been done. It is now time for action.

Where are developing countries priorities? Debt repayment or education? In Tanzania, for example:

"There are 2.2 million children not in school, and illiteracy is rising at 2% a year. The country has one of the lowest rates of progression from primary to junior secondary levels in the world, with fewer than 5% of children enrolling in secondary school. Public spending on debt in 1997-98 amounted to \$275 million or \$9 per capita. This is twice the per-capita spending on education and four times the spending on primary education"(Oxfam1999:3).

With debt cancellation from the north, more money can be directed toward education. This would lower the out-of-pocket expenses placed on parents and communities. Also, more funds could be used to improve teacher training, pay, and better incentives to those who relocate to remote regions.

The deteriorating quality of teacher training affects students' performance. With better training, teachers will be better equipped with skills to help their students master their courses and perform better on test that determine whether or not the student goes on to the next level. With better training, teachers can provide a positive role model for girls and be more gender sensitive.

Paying teachers salaries they can take care of themselves and their families with, will not only help improve their attitudes about their jobs, but will give them more of an incentive to do their very best. It would also help if the government followed through on all areas in incentive packages geared toward enticing teachers to relocate to remote areas

where teacher quality is at its lowest. When teachers hear of the government reneging on fellow teachers' incentive packages, it hurts the possibility of those who are willing to do so.

The administration of the Ministry of Education must be reorganized. This organization has become useless and worthless in the eyes of parents as they become more aware of the importance and benefits of their children receiving a good education. Because the MOE sets the standards for all organizations and agencies involved in education, it must be free of corruption and dedicated to the goal of achieving quality, free compulsory education for all children in Ghana. The Ministry of Education must keep tabs on all school officials, district assemblies, school administrators, PTAs, and various other community groups geared toward improving education, so that no group is lax or non-productive. The MOE must make sure that these various entities are working effectively, efficiently, and productively.

Most important, the government must take some of the pressure of funding education off parents. This can be done by eliminating school fees and/or keeping them consistent, and stopping others from imposing fees. The benefits of these ideas are well established.

For example, "In January 1997, the Ugandan government introduced a policy of universal primary education which removed the requirement that parents meet 50% of the costs of school fees. At the same timer, policy banned charges levied by Parent Teacher Associations. As a result, enrollment increased from 2.9 million to 5.7 million at the start of the 1997-1998 school year"(Oxfam 1999ch4:1).

Another example would be the case in Malawi. “The introduction of school fees in the mid-1980s led to a sharp decline in enrollments. In 1992, a major policy reversal started by withdrawing tuition fees for girls”. In 1994, fees for primary school students were waived. “By 1996, total enrollment reached 3.1 million, more than twice the number of students for 1993. Relaxing the uniform requirement provided an additional incentive for poor parents”(Oxfam 1999 ch4:1).

Enrollment rates in Ghana decrease with the introduction of new fees. “Cost problems are exacerbated when school fees are due during pre-harvest period, when access to income is most restricted”(Oxfam 1999 ch.4:1). Parents are willing to send their children to school the least when it is harvest time. Since children are needed to work alongside their parents at harvest time, school should not be in session. This way, children can do their share of family responsibilities and after harvest, their parents will be able to afford their school fees.

Something else to be considered is the removal of uniform requirements. Withdrawing uniform requirements “would reduce the costs of education significantly...without adverse implications for education equality, and with positive benefits in terms of equity”(Oxfam 1999 ch.4:1). This should be easy in Ghana considering many students can’t afford to wear them but attend school anyway.

Finally, because the leaders of industrialized countries agree that education is a human right, there must be more international awareness and involvement. There are so many people in the U.S. with good hearts that are willing to donate money to education improvement efforts. The information just needs to be out there. There are a few schools

that are currently funded by U.S citizens, one being the Dorsett Primary School in Kumasi, Ghana.

The United States, alone, has the means to substantially increase aid to African countries for education. Since Ghana has paid back most of its original debt, their existing debt should be completely cancelled. In return, previous debt service funds would go to education. It is impossible for Ghana to pay the World Bank and IMF and improve education also. Something has got to give and it should not be education.

Ghana can never realistically look forward to economic, social, and political prosperity without educating females. Their education ensures a brighter future for their children. The old saying “When you educate men, you educate individuals, but when you educate women, you educate nations” holds true.

Despite all the barriers that affect both boy’s and girls’ access to education, all is not lost. With a cooperative effort among the highly indebted countries, the IMF, the World Bank, and other lenders for debt education, Ghana can successfully educate every child within the next 10 or 15 years. I strongly believe that the situation in Ghana will get better.

Going to Ghana was the best thing I could have ever done as an undergraduate. It not only exposed me to an entirely new culture, but it opened my eyes to issues I knew nothing about. I hope to pass this valuable information on to others who strive to make a difference. This is why I think international awareness is such a key part. The knowledge that I have gained has encouraged me to choose international law as my area of study when I enter law school in fall of 2000.

I hope to one day build my own school where students will be taught the value of hard work, diligence, and determination, similar to the Dorsett School. These students will be have pride in their country and do what it takes to make it the great, self-sustaining country that it can be. Regardless of what goes on at home, children should be able to attend a school that is safe, clean, and well-equipped with learning materials. My goal is to encourage the Student Law Association at my future university to raise \$20,000 dollars in the northern region of Ghana. I plan to start a project in my community that encourages students in the U.S. to donate books they no longer read. These books will be sent to hundreds, hopefully thousands, of students who can put them to use. The program will not only benefit students in Ghana. The sense of accomplishment gained by U.S. students can do wonders for their self-image. Change can be made with effort and a ton of faith.

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## TABLES

Table 1. Gross Admission Rate by Sex

YEAR	GIRLS %	BOYS%	TOTAL
1981/82	77.3	90.45	83.78
1985/86	77.81	92.29	85.07
1989/90	78.67	87.87	83.2
1991/92	75.94	84.43	80.21

Resource: Girls' Education Unit

Table 2. Average Percentage of Girls Enrolled at Primary School by Region for 1988-89 to 1994-95

Region	Average% 1988-89 to 1994-95
Ashanti	46.9
Brongo Ahafo	46.1
Central	45.8
Greater Accra	49.3
Eastern	46.1
Northern	35.0
Upper East	39.3
Upper West	42.0
Volta	46.0
Western	45.5
National Average	44.2

Resource: Ministry of Education

Table 3. Percentage of Girls Enrolled at JSS Level by Region from 1989-90 to 1994-95

Region	Average% 1988 to 1995
Ashanti	43.5
Brong Ahafo	42.5
Central	40.1
Greater Accra	47.9
Eastern	41.4
Northern	28.1
Upper East	36.2
Upper West	37.5
Volta	40.2
Western	40.1
National Average	39.7

Source: Ministry of Education

\*Note the vast difference between the Great Accra Region and the Northern Region. In most African countries, the rural-urban divide is the widest of all, especially when the main city is also the national capital. Accra is an excellent example of this.

Table 4. Percentage of Girls Enrollment at SSS Level by Region from 1989-90 to 1994-95

Region	Average% 1989 to 1995
Ashanti	32.0
Brong Ahafo	26.4
Central	38.6
Eastern	37.0
Greater Accra	39.9
Northern	21.9
Upper East	31.7
Upper West	31.4
Volta	32.3
Western	33.0
National Average	32.4

Resource: Ministry of Education