

PRESS RELEASE

CAMPAIGN FOR "GOOD QUALITY AND ENJOYABLE BASIC EDUCATION FOR ALL"

DELIVERED ON BEHALF OF THE GNECC BY THE REV. DR.ABOAGYE-MENSAH, GENERAL SECRETARY, CHRISTIAN COUNCIL OF GHANA

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen of the media. We are gathered here today for a very important and pressing agenda, that is, to announce the making of a National Campaign to promote "good quality and enjoyable basic education for all" and to solicit your support for this campaign when it is formally launched. This press conference is being held simultaneously in Accra, Kumasi, Ho Tamale, and Takoradi to express the enormity of the issue.

We are gathered today in order to take advantage of the launch at an international level, of a Global campaign on Education. This launch is taking place simultaneously in several cities including London, Brussels, Washington DC, Johannesburg and Bangladesh. In all these cities, governments, donor agencies and the general public will be called upon to devote more resources to education, to free resources from dept servicing for education, and to work towards removing all barriers impeding universal access to good quality basic education for all children

The international campaign is a product of all collaborative effort of several international organizations including, Oxfam, UNESCO and many other international, etc. Supported by UNICEF, UNESCO and many other international bodies.

As we stand on the threshold of the 21st century, it is becoming increasingly clear that targets we set to ensure better quality of life for humankind will not be met. Slogans such as 'Health for all by the year 2000', have, today, lost their relevance. Ten years ago, the world's governments promised that all of the world's children would be getting good quality education by the year 2000. That promise has been broken. Therefore, we are carrying into the next millennium, problems we thought we would be rid of by now.

A new target has been set: universal primary education by 2015. On current trends, even this revised target will be missed, at least 75 million children will still be out of school on that date, if we do not take dramatic steps. Many more will be condemned to only poor quality education.

Yet, it is increasingly obvious that governments are failing to treat the crisis in education with the urgency it merits, and they are failing to mobilise the resources needed to end it. Many donors continue to treat education as a low priority issue. For example, financing education constitutes well below 10% of the World Bank's loan portfolio in Africa. Education sector policy making also leaves much to be desired. Those who are most affected by government policies and reforms-parents, communities, religious organizations who provide the bulk of education services and workers in the sector- feel left out in the decision-making process.

This campaign is to ensure that we do not break the promise again. We cannot afford to do so, knowing how crucial education is to the dignity of life and to any country's development. Sadly, you will see from the Educational Supplement (Education Agenda) we have distributed, kindly produced by public Agenda, that the situation in Ghana is a serious one, deserving urgency and everybody's attention.

We know that, in spite of constitutional provisions guaranteeing basic education as a right and government's sincere efforts at providing free compulsory universal basic education remains as distant today as it was in 1995, when government announced its Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) programme.

Whilst government devotes 36%-40% of its recurrent budget to education (a commendable action), overall spending on education remains low, i.e. 3-4% of GDP compared to over 6% of GDP in 1976.

The amount of money that the Ghana Government spent (in 1996) from its own budgetary resources to pay external debts was nearly 7 times what it spent in education and health combined. Debt reduction can free up substantial amounts for education. Many bilateral and multilateral donors can also do better in terms of devoting resources to education and the government can do better by involving all key stakeholders in the search for solutions and the management of education

Consequently, we in Ghana identify with the international campaign and have adapted it for our national agenda. To this need, we have come together as the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition (GNECC)

The GNECC is a network of more than 20 international and national organizations. (This list of participating organizations is provided at the end of this release).

As we said earlier, GNECC is preparing towards a major launch of the national campaign “Good Quality and Enjoyable Basic Education for All,” to which this press conference is but a signal

This is our message:

It is largely recognized that the size of the “f” in the FCUBE is diminishing so fast, it has almost disappeared. Parents and communities are forced to bear a disproportionate share of the cost of education. The high cost of education is leading poor parents withdrawing their wards especially girls from school.

We want to see a larger” FCUBE. Our message is that all barriers (local, national and international) to the equitable access, by all to good quality and enjoyable basic education must be removed. Nobody should be excluded because they cannot pay nor should the poor be condemned to poor quality education

We want to see the growing inequality in access and quality between the urban and the rural, the rich and the poor, boys and girls removed.

We want to see a serious effort at ensuring that all stakeholders play a serious role in the formulation of education policies and the management of educational institutions. To this end, we want to encourage the GES to deepen its existing programs aimed at community involvement in the management of educational institutions.

We want to see the donor community devoting more resources to education. They can support the government by enabling it to free resources from debt servicing for investment in education. We want donors to support our efforts to provide for our children good quality education. We want donors to support our efforts to provide for our children good quality education and not to directly manage our education sector

We want the GES and the MOE to recognize and adopt creative community-led or NGO-supported programs and those of the Religious Organisations designed to reach the poor and the excluded

We of the coalition would want to see the provision in the 1992 Republican Constitution which guarantees to “all persons... the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities,” come true in Ghana.

We are not unaware of the difficult task ahead, but we know with your cooperation and support we will make it. As we prepare to launch the Ghana Campaign, it is our hope that many more organizations will join the Ghana National Coalition on Education, that the public, including students, for-profit private organizations, will lend their support to the activities of GNECC. It is our dream that GNECC will emerge in all districts, villages, communities and schools.

Let’s make this world a better place for the generations to come. Let’s break the cycle of poverty through education.

Thank you.

List of members in the coalition

Action Aid

Oxfam International

Northern Ghana Coalition on Education (NGCE)

Northern Ghana Network for Development (NGND)

Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisations (GAPVOD)

Integrated Social development Centre (ISODEC)

Third World Network (TWN)

Christian Council of Ghana

National Union Association of Teachers (GNAT)

National Union Commission on Children

Centre for the Development of people (CEDEP)

National Association of people with Disability

Action on Disability and Development (ADD)

Professional Network (PRONET)

Muslim Relief Association of Ghana's Education Developers (ORPED)

UNICEF

African Development program (ADP)

Organisation of Rural Primary Education Developers (ORPED)

Catholic Relief Service (CRS)

Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative (SAPRI)

Federation of Organisations of People with Disability

Children's Rights International (CRI)