

GHANA NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS

GNAT IN THE FOREFRONT OF EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN GHANA

- A *HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE* – (1932 – 2006)

1. INTRODUCTION

Established some seventy-five (75) years ago, the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) has come a long way and it has succeeded in carving a niche for itself as one of the most vibrant Teachers Associations on the African continent.

The contribution of GNAT to the development of education in Ghana cannot be detached from the collective contribution of teachers to educational development.

Historically, the teaching profession in Ghana was a product of the educational expansion of the last quarter of the nineteenth century and embryonic unions of teachers especially at the beginning of the 1930s reflected the fragmentation of education at that time.

The formation of teachers associations in the 1930s was hindered by administrative particularism among other factors which characterized education delivery in the country.

This resulted from the absence of uniform regulations governing the service conditions of teachers in the country; for example, different salary levels and conditions of employment for Mission School teachers as against Government School teachers who were regarded as part of Colonial Government administration.

Again the 1930s witnessed a world-wide economic depression which sent the economies of many countries tottering and Ghana, with its monocrop (cocoa) dependency, was no exception.

A government-appointed committee under F.E. Tallard recommended the reduction in the educational budget in the sum of £50,000 among fiscal measures the government should take in order to contain the situation. To meet this recommendation, the government decided to reduce the salaries of mission school teachers by proposing a bill in 1931 to reduce the salaries of non-government school teachers by 29%. This was vehemently opposed by the teachers and, as a result, a protest movement led by J.T.N. Yankah of the Accra Bishop School was formed.

A petition was sent to the Governor-in-Council and with further lobbying of the African members of the Legislative Council who were in the minority, the 29% salary cut directed against teachers was abandoned and a general cut of 5% was imposed on all salary earning people which was later withdrawn altogether.

This was a great achievement considering the odds and the attitude of management at that time and this propelled the teachers into forming a union to protect their interests. It was christened the Assisted School Teachers' Union (ASTU). This was in 1932. In an attempt to embrace all classes of teachers in the country, the union changed its name to the Gold Coast Teachers Union (GCTU) in 1937 with well defined professional and economic objectives.

Right from the beginning, a number of fragmented associations based on church affiliations, levels, subjects and qualifications were formed in 1940-1950.

Again between 1932 and 1958 there were two rival teachers organizations in the country. However, through the influence of the government and of the Industrial Relations Act, 1958 these two rival unions were brought together in a merger under the Trades Union Congress (TUC), as Teachers and Educational Workers' Union (TEWU).

In 1962 teachers opted out of the TUC and re-organized under the new name of Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT),

It should be noted that teachers played a preponderant role in the struggle for Ghana's Independence in 1957. The first Parliament at independence had about 55% of its membership as teachers. Teachers were at the vanguard of mobilizing the populace in every corner of the country.

With the launching of the Accelerated Development for Education in 1951, a number of schools were opened and this resulted in an increase in teacher population in the country.

Thousands of middle school leavers were pressed into teaching while a number of new training colleges were opened.

Moreover, teachers became assemblymen and held important positions in the new government at the time.

The GNAT which was inaugurated on the 14th of July 1962 by the Minister of Education at the time opened a new chapter in the annals of teachers and the teaching profession in the country.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The GNAT is an organization of teachers in pre-tertiary educational institutions and offices in Ghana. The mission of GNAT is to unify all teachers in pre-tertiary educational institutions and strive for better conditions of service and job security as well as enhance their professional status.

In furtherance of this mission, GNAT has the following objectives:

- Protecting and safeguarding the trade union rights of teachers;
- Promoting academic and professional development of members;
- Promoting quality education for all and participation in decision making processes;
- Educating members on their professional responsibilities and promoting good professional conduct and ethics;
- Co-operating with national and international bodies, NGOs and other civil organizations for promoting education and other basic rights;
- Mobilizing members for co-operative schemes to provide economic services and social protection.

3. HOW THE GNAT WORKS

a) Two structures operate within the GNAT. These are:

- i. the Political hierarchy which has responsibility for the formulation of policy guidelines and executive direction;
- ii. the Administrative set-up, which is the secretariat that implements the policies and programmes of the Association.

b) The Political (Structure) hierarchy is based on effective representation where the representatives carry the mandate of the members they represent. It is therefore necessary for members at the various levels to be seriously involved in electing worthy representatives.

c) The various levels of the Association are:

- i. Basic Unit (School Branch)
- ii. Local Branch
- iii. District Branch
- iv. Regional Branch
- v. National

- d) The Basic Unit (School Branch) of the Association at the grassroots is the educational establishment (i.e. school, college, or education office). All teachers in such educational establishments are eligible to be members of the Association.
- e) The branch elects a leader (known as the School Representative) who co-ordinates the activities of the Association at the basic level, including attending meetings and participating in decision-making at the local level and carrying back decisions to his or her school branch.
- f) The Local Branch embraces all the basic units (school branches) in any specific locality.
- g) The district branch is made up of all local branches in a given district.
- h) The Regional Branch is constituted by the branches in any given administrative region.
- i) All the regional branches together constitute the National Association.
- j) The Administrative set-up is headed by the General Secretary as the Chief Executive Officer. This position is by appointment. She/He is assisted in the performance of his/her duties by deputies and other officers who have specific schedules at the national level. Administrative functions in the regions are handled by regional secretaries and their assistants.
There are also full-time secretaries who are responsible for administrative functions in all the districts.
- k) GNAT also has a pool of supporting staff at the National and Regional levels that assist with accounting, secretarial, housekeeping and various forms of manual work.

4. DECISION-MAKING IN GNAT

- a) Decisions are made by accredited representatives of the members at the various levels of the Association. These representatives are enjoined to be in constant touch with the members they represent.
- b) i. Delegates conferences are the highest decision-making bodies of the Association at the various levels. Major decisions are taken at the various conferences, which are attended by the accredited representatives of the members. It is at such conferences that the officers of the Association at the various levels are elected. Currently National, Regional and District delegates' conferences are held once in four years whereas local delegates' conferences are held once in two years.
- ii. Issues that come up for discussions at Conferences emanate from the grassroot levels of the Association through resolutions and memoranda.

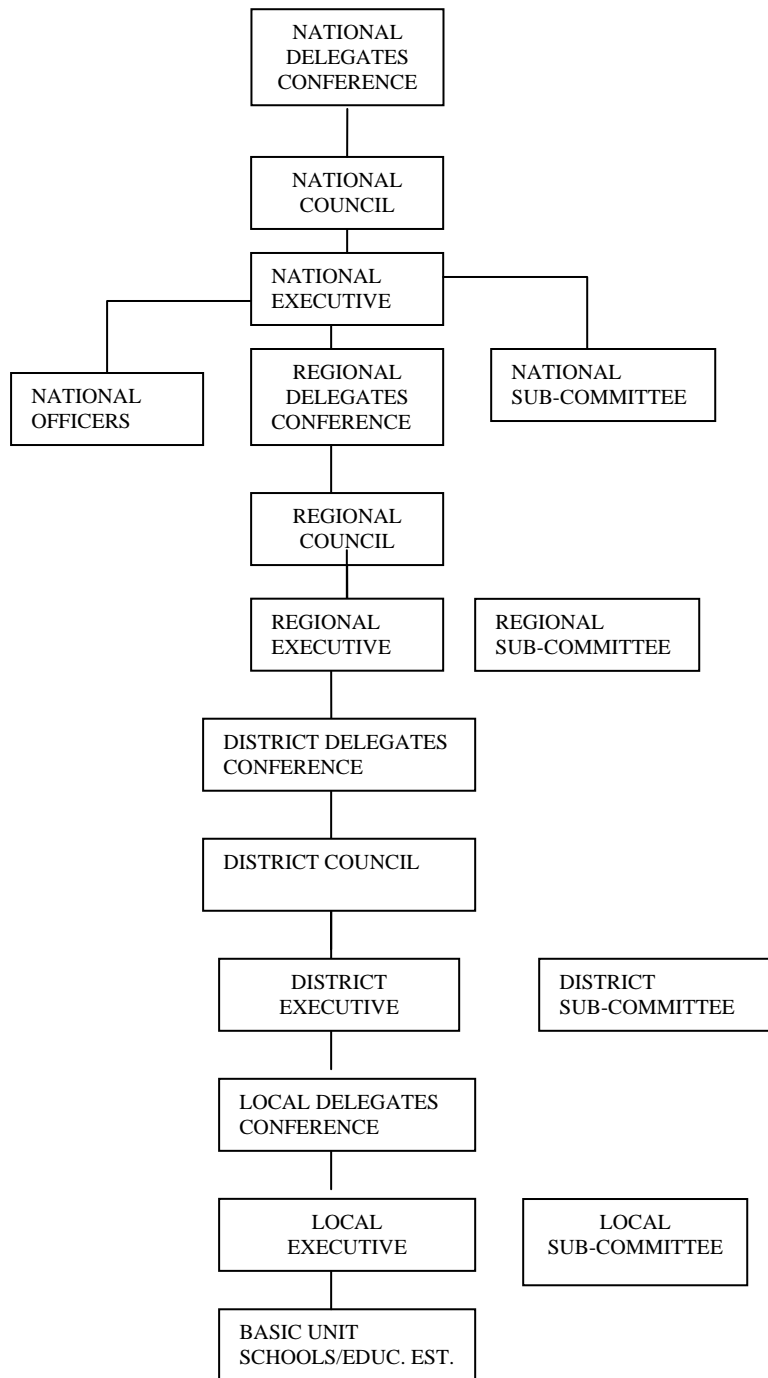
- c) i. Councils manage the affairs of the Association and take major decisions between conferences. Councils operate at the National, Regional and District levels of the Association.
- ii. Councils could review decisions taken at conferences. Such reviews are normally influenced by conditions prevailing within the Association after the last conference. Councils meet more regularly, at least once a year.
- d) i. The Executives give direction for the day-to-day administration of the Association at the various levels.
- ii. The Executives also meet at least once in three months. By this, they closely monitor the implementation of Council decisions and could review such decisions as and when necessary to ensure the dynamic development of the Association.
- iii. The Executives are also expected to regularly inform their constituents about decisions taken at their various levels. They are similarly expected to ventilate the feelings of their members on issues to the secretariats and the Councils at their levels.
- e) i. The National Officers of the Association are the President, Vice-President, Treasurer and two Trustees who are elected by the National Delegates Conference and hold office for four (4) years subject to re-election for another term.
- ii. By their schedules, National Officers meet once a month to, among other things, take or review important decisions as may be called for between meetings of the National Executive and to monitor the operational activities of the National Secretariat.
- f) The National President is the head of the Association. She/He presides over major meetings and conferences of the Association as well as superintends the general administration of all the officers of the Association. Political and all major policy statements are made by his/her representatives.
Regional, District and Local Chairmen exercise corresponding functions at their levels.
- g) The National Treasurer is the authorizing officer of the Association: Regional, District and Local Treasurers perform similar functions at their levels.

h) Sub-committees: These are advisory bodies on:

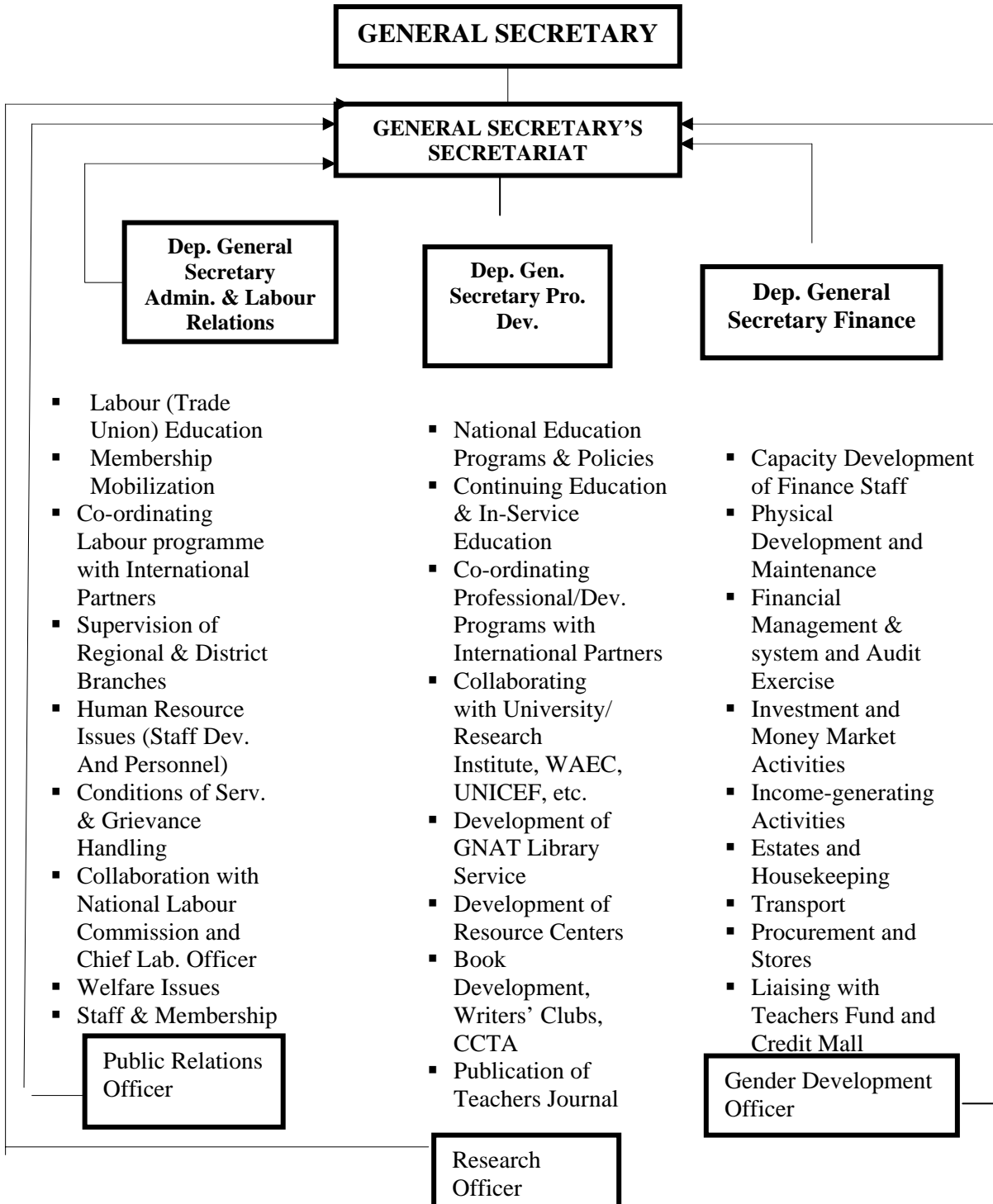
- Education and Professional Development
- Salaries and Conditions of Service
- Finance and Administration
- Socio-Economic and Gender issues
- Ad hoc committees (as and when necessary)

They are normally appointed by the Executives at the various levels and are primarily charged to advise on issues bordering on their areas of reference.

ORGANOGRAM OF THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF GNAT



**ORGANOGRAM OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE
STRUCTURE OF GNAT HEADQUARTERS**



7. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Association believes in alliances and coalitions with other workers organizations in championing the cause of members. The Forum is a coalition of four Public Service organizations namely, Civil Servants Association of Ghana (CSAG), Ghana Registered Nurses Association (GRNA), Judicial Service Staff Association of Ghana (JUSAG) and Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT). The main objective of the Forum is to provide a common platform for workers who subsist on the Consolidated Fund for their emoluments in their attempts to attract the best of terms from the Government who is their main employer.

The GNAT also has healthy working relations with the Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the Ghana Federation of Labour (GFL), the new and second labour centre in the country. In addition to these, GNAT is charter member of Education International, the largest world body of teachers and educational workers with headquarters in Brussels, Belgium.

8. SOME ACHIEVEMENTS OF GNAT

With dedication, sacrifices and through constructive and committed teachers unionism, the members of GNAT have chalked some significant achievements and made positive contributions to national development.

These achievements include:

- i. Unification of over 90% of teachers and administrators in public pre-tertiary educational establishments into one single union covering all grades of teachers with unified Conditions and Scheme of Service.
- ii. Establishment of the Ghana Teaching Service in 1974 which was later transformed into Ghana Education Service in 1976;
- iii. Constitutional Recognition of Ghana Education Service as one of the Public Services of Ghana in 1974;
- iv. Reconstitution of the Ghana Education Service Council (under GES Act 506 of 1995) after it had been abolished under PNDCL 42;
- v. Accelerated promotion for all grades of qualified teachers under a unified Scheme of Service. This allowed for a teacher to be promoted to a Senior position and still remain in the classroom;
- vi. Granting of study leave facilities to qualified teachers and the reintroduction of allowances for teacher trainees during the early part of the 1990s;
- vii. Use of check-off system for the collection of membership dues;

viii. Registration as Trade Union with the issuance of a Collective Bargaining Certificate in June 2006.

ix. **Salaries:**

- a) Placement of teachers on the Ghana Universal Salary Structure. In addition to that GNAT has been negotiating for improved salaries with the Central Management Board (CMB) alongside other public service employees including CSA, GRNA and JUSAG (as demanded by PNDCL.309).
- b) GNAT had negotiated for Diplomates from the then Specialist teacher training institutions in Winneba to be placed on the salary scale of Superintendent on entering the Service. In the same vein, graduate professionals from University of Cape Coast were given a higher salary point than those from the other universities on entering the Service;
- c) With the Collective Bargaining Certificate, GNAT negotiated on behalf of all teachers in public pre-tertiary sector, directly with GES as employer in 2006.

x. **Legal Services**

Handling of personal cases of teachers arising out of Conditions of Service and employment. We have at various times made available to our members the services of our legal retainers in the regions and also paid for them.

xi. **Professional Development:**

- Institution of remedial programmes for Failed/Referred teachers who could not pass their final teacher training certificate examinations at the first sitting;
- Modular courses for Certificate 'B' teachers and Middle School Leaving Certificate holders were the initiatives of GNAT;
- Organisation of Ordinary and Advance levels Courses for 4-year Certificate 'A' Teachers.

- Distance Education Programme

It has been through the advocacy of GNAT that the Government has decided to put facilities in place for the beneficiaries of the programme.

- Invigilation Allowances

It was GNAT which started the agitation for some form of recognition from WAEC for invigilating examinations. This was as far back as the late 1970s and it then began in the form of some honorarium to the Head of the School for refreshment of the Staff. This “refreshment” was later delineated in monetary terms which is currently being referred to as “invigilation allowances”.

- In-Service training for various categories of teaching personnel

Under a longstanding arrangement with the Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF), the GNAT has been organizing inservice training programmes for selected teachers and heads of schools in educational administration and the teaching of various subjects.

- Early Childhood Development Programme

The GNAT has been able to advocate for the inclusion of early childhood development in the general school system of Ghana. It has organized early childhood educators into a well structured constituent body.

Sandwich programme for graduate teachers

Again it was GNAT which prompted Alhaji Gbadamosi, the then Director-General of the GES to find money to help graduate teachers to participate in the PGCE/PGDE programmes at the University of Cape Coast.

xii. **Economic and Welfare Ventures**

- GNAT Hostels

GNAT has striven to build hostels all over the country and some are serving as centers to facilitate the Distance education programme while being convenient venues for teachers (including graduates) marking WAEC examination scripts;

- Acquisition of SSNIT Flats

In the 1990s, GNAT facilitated the acquisition of some SSNIT flats all over the country to help ease the accommodation problems of some teachers. Most of these flats have now been fully acquired by the sitting tenants who are teachers.

- Teachers Credit Union

a) The Teachers Fund which was started on 1st May, 1998 with 138 Million Cedis in the first month now stands over 51 billion Cedis. Teachers are able to source loan facilities

from the Fund for various reasons without hindrance. Some of the loans facilities include personal, habitat insurance and small business initiatives. The Fund has ordered cars from overseas for interested teachers.

b) **Credit Mall Ltd.**

A Consumer Credit Venture for the Teachers Fund assists teachers to credit consumer items at moderate prices.

Inception

The Teachers Fund Credit Mall Limited, as the name goes, is a subsidiary of the Teachers Fund of the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT). It started operations in the year 2001.

Objective

The objective of the company is to sell durable, but affordable, household appliances on hire purchase to our members irrespective of their location at the same price without any deposit.

Target Group

Teachers who are GNAT members and are contributors to the Teachers Fund.

Achievements of the Credit Mall Ltd.

We have supplied/sold goods (items) to over forty thousand of our members and still continuing.

- We have maintained our prices, even with the economic trends, to date.
- We have created a strong presence in the hire-purchase business in the country.
- We have increased our product portfolio from two items (i.e. TV & VCR) since we started operations, to forty-four and we keep adding to meet the specific needs of our members etc.

xiii. **Pension Review Commission**

It was the agitations of the GNAT membership that culminated in Government setting up the Commission;

xiv. **Representation on Public Boards/Committees**

GNAT is represented on several important Public Boards, Commissions and Committees, such as the SSNIT Board, National Media Commission, WAEC and GES Council.

xv. **Other Forms of Assistance**

- a) These include in-service training programmes run annually in collaboration with our sister organizations like the Canadian Teachers Federation (CTF) and BUPL of Denmark;
- b) Women's programmes for our female teachers. The Gender Desk has assisted female teachers undertake tests for cervical and breast cancer
- c) HIV/AIDS programmes including VCT.
Under these, the Gender Desk in collaboration with the Ghana AIDS Commission has widened the implementation of the HIV/AIDS Project in the education sector. It has also been conducting counselling sessions for teachers with HIV/AIDS.

xvi. Construction of a Teachers Village at Abankro in Ashanti Region.

SOME CHALLENGES OF GNAT

GNAT, like any other human institution, is not without challenges.

These include:

- i. Labour Act 2003 (ACT 651)
The Act which guarantees freedom of Association and the right of even two workers to form a union is one big challenge.
But we need to strengthen teacher unity because it is through unity of purpose and action that we can forge ahead and chalk greater success.
- ii. The Changing composition of the membership in terms of age, qualifications and levels of operation and its implications for union policies and programmes. The membership is heterogeneous, ranging from Early Childhood Educators to the Director-General of the GES with each segment having its peculiar interests.
- iii. Apathy and mistrust of the rank and file which has to be tackled through the institution of relevant and interest-sustaining programmes.
- iv. Militancy of the rank and file against the sobriety of the leadership sometimes creating a gap between the two which needs to be addressed through continuous dialogue.
- v. Insufficient information and education among the rank and file about the Association;
- vi. Government's neo-liberalist economic policies coupled with the worsening economic climate, leading to deteriorating conditions of service which render collective bargaining ineffective. In this vein, getting a meaningful salary for teachers or favourable Conditions of Employment has become a nagging problem.

- vii. Monetarisation of all aspects of union activities thereby undermining voluntarism and dedication to union goals, programmes and activities.
- viii. Promoting and upholding the unity and solidarity of the Association.
- ix. Development of temporary and permanent partnerships and coalitions with stakeholders and other civil society organizations.

CONCLUSION

The National Council of GNAT wishes to use this opportunity to inform the general public and all teachers in Ghana that GNAT is not oblivious to the problems that stand in the way of helping teachers enjoy favourable working conditions and improved social status. As we prepare to meet the above challenges, we will continuously examine what we are doing to be sure that we are really moving in the right direction. This, of course, will depend, to a greater extent, on the constructive suggestions and analyses from the general membership of teachers in the field. The Association would continue to analyze its strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Accordingly may we use this period of Ghana's Jubilee celebration to assure our members that we would do everything possible to maintain a harmonious industrial atmosphere for the good of all. Teachers remain a critical segment of the human resources for economic and political development of Ghana. We crave their indulgence to always contact us whenever they do not understand any issue so that they will not fall prey to any misinformation. We also want to use this rare opportunity to congratulate the Government and people of Ghana.

Note:

For more information on the activities of GNAT, please Click on our website: www.ghanateachers.org.

ISSUED BY PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT OF GNAT

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