

It is Possible

ISODEC story on Girl-Child
Education in Ghana

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Preface

At the time when educational reforms started in Ghana, little thought was given to the roles national NGOs could play in the implementation of the Government's policy agenda. Many felt educational development was the preserve of the Government and its institutions and NGO participation was only limited to providing educational services. By engaging in the sector through the Girl-Child Education Project, ISODEC has set in motion, a viable option for engaging government.

The scepticism around NGO – Government relationships is based on an unfounded mistrust and fear for each other. It is important to note that an organisation like ISODEC adopts a proactive approach to advocacy based on its conviction and social values that the people of Ghana have a right to improved quality social services. Guided by its values, the organisation engages in interventions that ensures those rights are protected and works towards defending them. Unfortunately, some of the past advocacy initiatives were used as a means to express dislike for the organisation.

Today, ISODEC is using “**it is possible**” to demonstrate that an NGO can and is capable of supporting Government and its institutions to do what they have a comparative advantage in. It further shows that an NGO does not necessarily need to take direct contracts from Government before it can operate. ISODEC and NOVIB have worked collaboratively with District Assemblies in the implementation of the GCEP. By so doing, attention has been drawn to the fact that an NGO can facilitate Government in the discharge of its constitutional responsibilities.

The experiences gained from the implementation of the GCEP would be very valuable to other stakeholders in the sector. It is for this basic reason that these have been pulled together. The approach used is also to stimulate other

civil society organisations (CSOs) to take up the challenge of defending the rights of the poor and marginalised in our society. Let us combine our efforts in the fight against poverty and also engage constructively in the reform agenda of the Government. Failure to do this is tantamount to rejecting the role assigned CSOs as the third arm of the chair. When that arm is crooked or broken, the chair cannot stand. The implication is the nation would also not be built on a sound footing.

The Government of Ghana has prepared its poverty reduction strategy and education is one of the areas of focus. There is the need to ensure that resources allocated to the sector are used for the benefit of the people. The mechanism for achieving these is to ensure effective community engagement in the policy process and promoting the concept of decentralisation to the letter.

“**It is possible**” has been made so because of the level of support the GCEP provided to the district and sub-district level structures. Fighting poverty on a sustainable basis requires building institutional capacities at the lower levels and in communities. It is ISODEC's belief that holding public officials accountable is not just through the submission of reports and audited accounts.

But, it is through the initiative of an empowered people who have the capability to demand that those in authority account for their stewardship. Until the concepts of participation and ownership are embedded within the education sector reform process, the sustainability of the initiatives would be difficult to achieve.

The story being told through this publication is not new. It is a way of reminding all actors in the sector that, unless a holistic approach is adopted to improving the quality of education, the initiatives would amount to waste of

public resources. The girl-child cannot wait to be an illiterate adult before we start other forms for support. **“It is possible”** is simply saying the time to act is now.

Bishop Akolgo

ISODEC Executive Director

Acknowledgements

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Special thanks also go to the officials of the Ministry of Education and Sports, particularly those in the Girl-Child Education Unit in the Regions and Districts for their many forms of assistance. For your cooperative support, not much would have been achieved.

Other agencies such as UNICEF, FAWE and other development partners, took interest in the implementation of the project. Your collective support has contributed towards the lessons we are sharing through this medium.

The project team from ISODEC took pains to document their observations and these contributed a lot in the development of the document. It is therefore important to express appreciation to the ISODEC teams in Sunyani, Kumasi, Tamale and Bolgatanga who worked relentlessly in the field during the implementation of the GCEP. The technical and backstopping support provided from the head office further helped to clarify issues associated with the project. Special mention must be made of Bishop Akolgo, Ernest Tay Awoosah and Emmanuel Kyuole who took pains to read through all the materials generated.

List of Abbreviations

BPA	Beneficiary Parents Association
CMT	Community Management Team
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DA	District Assembly
DCE	District Chief Executive
DMT	District Management Team
EFA	Education for All
GCEP	Girl-child Education Project
GES	Ghana Education Service
GLSS	Ghana Living Standard Survey
ISODEC	Integrated Social Development Centre
MOU	Memorandum for Understanding
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
SMC	School Management Team

Executive Summary

The Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC), is a national NGO in Ghana that has developed linkages with various institutions both within and outside the country. The organization has created a niche for itself as one of the leading civil society organisations (CSOs) that focus on evidenced-based advocacy using the rights-based approach. Its work in the water and sector and the fight against the privatization of water in Ghana, have been adequately documented. The putting together of this document dubbed “**It is Possible**”, is in furtherance of ISODEC’s belief in using its field experiences to guide its advocacy initiatives. “**It is Possible**” is ISODEC’S story on how the education sector policy framework for Ghana can be implemented with a view to ensuring increased enrolment, retention and performance of the girl-child. The Education sector policy is promoting reduction in gender disparity in the educational system and ISODEC is using “**It is possible**” as a tool to influence thinking on how policy can be implemented at the local level.

The from historical perspectives, the development of education since the colonial era has been with the focus of providing the nation with the manpower required for efficient and effective management of the country. Due to this, large sums of money was spent building school infrastructure, training teachers, providing teaching and learning materials and other support services. The early initiatives saw an improvement in the sector thus making education in the country an envy of other countries in the sub-region. Overtime, government priorities shifted to other sectors, thus resulting in reduction in the quantum of funding allocated to the education sector. The ultimate effect was a drop in the quality of education by the 1980s.

A review of the situation led to the realization that more proactive measures have to be taken to revamp the sector. In line with this, some of the initiatives taken included the Education Sector Reforms of the mid-1980s, the development of the FCUBE programme in the 1990s and most recently, the design of the Education Strategic Plan 2003 – 2005. These measures were all geared towards improving the quality of education, increasing access and improving education management, in addition to promoting science education. Much as these initiatives have led to some short-term gains, the Government is still faced with the challenge of sustaining these gains. A report on the review of the sector in 2004 recommended that new strategies have to be developed, there is the need to increase resource allocation to the sector, ensure community engagement in education management, among others, as part of the process of sustaining the gains.

The implication is that there is the need for a more critical assessment of the situation, based on which new strategies can be designed. Of particular interest is the need to understand the underlying factors affecting school enrolment, retention and performance, particularly at the basic level. In undertaking the analysis, critical attention has to be paid to the needs of the girl-child as reducing gender disparity is a core element in the sector reform process.

Prior to the review of the sector by Government, ISODEC and her partner, NOVIB, had undertaken an initiative on addressing the problems affecting the education of the girl-child. The vehicle for carrying through the initiative was the design of the Girl-Gild Education Project (GCEP) which

was implemented over a six-year period (1999 – 2004). Implementation of the GCEP involved the use of a mix of strategies, just as the review report is recommending. After assessing the situation and analyzing the information, it became obvious that the problems confronting the education of the girl-child involved institutional, social, economic and other dimensions. It was therefore more appropriate to adopt a more holistic approach to solving the problems.

The key issues identified and which informed the choice of strategies included the following, among others:

- Low incomes at household and community levels
- Lack of knowledge on the benefits of educating the girl-child
- Low social value placed on the girl-child
- Inadequate infrastructure and poor school environment.

Armed with this information, the GCEP was designed with a view to increasing access to education for the girl-child by implementing activities that would ensure their enrolment, retention as well as improve their performance. In addition, the project was designed with a focus of mainstreaming the strategies within the District Assembly planning processes as a measure for ensuring its sustainability.

Achieving these required adoption of different mechanisms for addressing the problems identified as militating against the education of the girl-child. Most critical was the need to dovetail the project process into ISODEC's own values and mission. In line with this, the rights-based approach (RBA) to addressing poverty was used as the guiding principle for designing the strategies and activities. In addition, the project process was used to promote the principles of transparency and accountability, which are the

bedrock for a good governance system.

In order to understand the outcome of the project, it is important to discuss how the project process was used to make the wheels turn.

The project process involved all the stakeholders right from the data collection stage till the final evaluation of the project. By working with District Assemblies, the Ghana Education Service District Directorate, the Communities and their institutions, the project succeeded in promoting inclusiveness and increased ownership of the interventions. The management of the day to day activities, as well as the resources allocated for carrying them out, was the responsibility of the District Management Teams (DMTs). In addition, the project built capacity in areas identified as critical to ensuring effective implementation of the activities. At community level, appropriate structures were established by the DMTs to oversee project implementation. The strategy further helped to ensure a high level of commitment by the stakeholders.

In order to increase the level of enrolment, retention and performance of the girl-child, various activities geared towards motivating the girl-child and parents were undertaken. These activities included the provision of scholarship schemes using a very transparent process that gave all children the opportunity to be selected as beneficiaries.

The creation of the girl-child clubs was used a pivot for promoting reading culture amongst the girls in the school. The girl-child clubs were also used as a channel for providing sex and reproductive health education, including environmental sanitation to the members. Another dimension was the organization of extra classes during vacation so the girls would be engaged and encouraged to learn

hard. Study tours were also organized and this gave the girls the opportunity to visit places on interest and to interact with women who have excelled because of their educational backgrounds. These incentives helped to motivate both the children and parents alike thereby resulting in improved attendance in school.

Other approaches used included building a critical mass of community change agents by working with queen mothers and other leaders in the communities. For purposes of ensuring the parents of beneficiary students have access to funds to finance the education of their girl-children, new forms of income generating activities were introduced. Working within the District Assembly structure and supporting the inclusion of girl-child education in District Assembly plans, were also part of the process of ensuring project sustainability.

There is enough evidence to show that the project process did make an impact by influencing the thinking of district level institutions, community members and their leaders and the girls themselves, about the importance of girl-child education.

The GCEP, however, faces the challenge of continuity with the project coming to an end. The challenge is based on the likelihood of participating District Assemblies not injecting adequate funds into implementation of the processes designed. The challenge becomes more critical because the central government is focusing more on infrastructure development and training of teachers. The tendency is that District Assemblies may follow suit and neglect the implementation of the processes developed by the GCEP. This challenge is part of the learning points of the project.

Other learning points include the need to scale up partnership at the District

level to involve other stakeholders who are not working directly under the District Directorate of Education. The GCEP was implemented through the DMTs whose membership cut across sectors and this helped a lot in the implementation of the activities. In addition, there is the need to look critically at what other agencies are doing so that appropriate coordination and communication mechanisms can be developed. This is essential for enhancing the attainment of policy goals in a more coherent manner. Women are more willing to support the education of the girl-child but the attitude of some of the men increases the vulnerability of the women. It is therefore important to target the men in an initiative of this nature.

The learning points are issues that need to be taken into consideration in the implementation of the education sector policy. They, however, have implications for both public sector and civil society actors both in the policy arena as well as in the implementation of interventions.

It is the government's responsibility to ensure that good quality services, including education services are provided as of right. Likewise, it is the responsibility of CSOs to ensure that those rights are protected and that government lives up to its obligation.

Government needs to demonstrate its commitment to its own policies by ensuring the institutional structures at the local level are given the leverage to take initiatives. Coupled with this, is the allocation of adequate resources to sectors that ensure the political, economic cultural and social rights of the people are protected. Increasing funding to the education sector as proposed by the 2004 Review Report is what is expected from Government. Most critical, as demonstrated by GCEP, is the need to blend the approaches to be used so the situation can be addressed in a holistic manner. This calls for concerted action from

civil society groups working in the interest of the poor and marginalised.

Part One

1. Introduction

The paper presents an outline of the success stories and lessons learnt in the course of implementing the GCEP project over the period 1999 to 2004. The first part of the document provides a background of ISODEC and the philosophy guiding its operations. The second part is an examination of the state of the girl-child with regard to access to good quality education. It begins with a discussion of the key elements of the policy on Education for All. In addition, it focuses on a discussion of the situation of the girl-child in the project areas. It is the analysed situation that provided the justification for the GCEP intervention, thus the need to highlight it. There is also an outline of the goals, objectives and strategies developed for addressing the problems faced by the girl-child.

Part three of the document, is a discussion of the mechanisms used in promoting change at the District level. The key issues covered in the section are the processes used to promote inclusiveness in the project process, gaining commitment of the key stakeholders, the flexibility of the processes and steps taken to ensure the project is sustained by the District Assemblies. The discussion is geared towards exposing the fact that improving access to good quality education for the girl-child requires a holistic approach. The mechanisms have to be embedded in the structures responsible for providing good quality of life for the people.

In Part Four, the focus is to provide evidence for the successes achieved. It therefore provides testimonies from the perspectives of the stakeholders and beneficiaries. Case studies of the reality on the ground are captured as well. This discussion leads to Part Five of the document which is an articulation of the lessons learnt and experiences gained over the six years that the project has been in operation. The discussion of the lessons learnt is to help policy makers and other

development actors gain an understanding of what not to do in the course of implementing the policy on education for all, particularly when focusing on the girl-child. The concluding section, which is captioned **Action Now....** is a commentary on the project generally. It also captures what can be done by civil society in its pursuit of ensuring the policy on education is implemented to the letter.



Hidden Faces Behind GCEP in ISODEC

Part Two

2. Background

In 1984, the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC) was established to help alleviate the poverty level of rural and urban poor in Ghana. Since its inception, ISODEC has provided support services as well as implemented interventions in slums and rural communities. The broad range of services provided has helped to create visibility for the organisation as one of the key actors in the development sector in Ghana.

ISODEC has strategically positioned itself to engage in policy debate in the country. In addition, ISODEC has introduced innovative products in the development landscape in Ghana. The various approaches used are derived from the core values of the organisation which are enshrined in its vision and mission. A critical element is the belief that people must live a life of dignity.

ISODEC's mission is to *work for sustainable development through the empowerment of the poor, women and the marginalised and for the attainment of human rights and social justice*. Based on the mission of the organisation, ISODEC adopts a people-centred approach as the organisation believes that every human life matters just as much as any other. These values guided the design of the Girl-Child Education Project (GCEP).

In 1998 ISODEC worked with the District Assemblies of Sekyere East, Asante Akim South, Ahafo Ano North in the Ashanti region and Jaman and Asutifi in the Brong Ahafo region to develop and implement a three year Girl Child Education Project (GCEP). The project was launched following a six-month pilot phase, and aimed at promoting access of the girl-child to good and meaningful education, especially at the basic level.

The project was funded by the Netherlands Organisation for International Development Corporation (NOVIB), with the five

participating districts contributing both financially and in-kind support towards project implementation period.

The first phase of the project ended in the year 2001 after which it was evaluated and a second phase started in 2002. The second phase of the project involved consolidation of the various interventions implemented during the first phase while expanding the coverage to the Northern and Upper East Regions.

The Districts that were included in the second phase of the project were West Mamprusi district in the Northern Region and Bawku East and Bongo districts in the Upper East region.

In 2000 ISODEC made a paradigm shift from a service providing to a rights-based advocacy organization. In view of this, the GCEP was integrated into the Rights-Based Advocacy I programme. The scope of the project was therefore expanded to include promoting the rights of the Girl Child to education.

The project has undoubtedly been a success and has recorded many useful lessons that need to be shared with a wider audience. It is for the purpose of sharing the experiences gained that ISODEC has decided to document its success stories. A wider dissemination of these lessons and stories have become very relevant at this time when the District Assemblies are making effort to secure alternative funding to continue project activities. In addition, ISODEC would be launching a campaign dubbed "**it is possible**" under its RBA II programme. The campaign is aimed at showing how constraints on access and quality of girls' education can be surmounted based on experiences from the GCEP.

Part Three

3. Understanding the GCEP Environment

Moving from Policy Perspectives

The development of education in Ghana dates back to the colonial times when serious efforts were made to improve access and quality. Since independence, various governments have looked at educational development as central to the socio-economic transformation of the country. In spite of this conviction and efforts made by the various governments, the quality of education which was the envy of other countries in the West African sub-region had dropped by the 1980s.

Factors accounting for the situation included inadequate funding as the percentage of GDP allocated to education dropped drastically. This affected the ability to:

- construct more schools
- maintain the existing facilities
- procure basic textbooks and learning materials
- motivate and retain teachers in the classroom
- provide support services such as supervision and
- train more teachers.

A critical review of the situation led to the design of measures to address the problems affecting the sector's development. The efforts towards addressing the down-turn in the educational sector started with the Education Sector Reforms of the mid-1980s. The reforms positively led to re-structuring of the educational sector and did lead to some initial improvements. But, these were short-lived as the core issues relating to improving quality of education were not adequately addressed. In addition, community participation was not promoted as a deliberate effort to sustaining the gains made. The problems of the 1980s were therefore not removed thus pushing the standard of education lower.

The Government responded again in the 1990s with the introduction of the Free, Compulsory Basic Education (FCUBE) programme, in line with Article 38 of the 4th Republican Constitution of Ghana. To strategically address the problems confronting the sector, the Education Strategic Plan 2003 – 2015 was prepared. The plan was designed to fit into the National Education Goals which are:

- Provision of facilities to ensure all citizens, irrespective of age, gender, tribe, religion and political affiliation, are functionally literate and self-reliant
- Provision of basic education for all
- Creation of Opportunities for Open Education for All
- Education and training for skill development with emphasis on science, technology and creativity
- Higher Education for the development of middle and top level manpower requirements.

These broad national goals are the pillars for policy design and provision of education services within the Ministry of Education and by other stakeholders. The policy goals under the Education Sector Plan are captured under four main themes and these are:

- Equitable access to education
- Quality of education
- Educational management
- Science, technology and TVET

These thematic areas have ten (10) objectives including increased participation in education, provision of equal opportunities for girls, promotion of health and environmental sanitation in schools and prevention and management of HIV/AIDS, among others.

The Preliminary Education Sector Review Report 2004¹ indicates there have been improvements with regard to attainment of policy goals and targets. But, the report further observes that the short-term gains could be eroded, thus making it difficult to attain the targets set by 2015. It is in this regard that the report proposes:

- Priority should be given to the design of new strategies for improving primary and JSS enrolment and retention.
- Increased resource allocation for primary and JSS levels beyond the 35.1% of the education budget as recorded in 2004. Increasing budgetary allocation will ensure increased access to students, particularly girls, from poorer families. Through this approach, the expected social returns to society will be greater.
- Removal of cost barriers, particularly at the District level where levies are imposed, as these form a barrier to access for children from poor families.
- Provision of adequate information on the benefits of educating the child, including information on students' performance. This proposition focuses on the demand side of the equation by addressing issues which influence the decisions of parents.
- Increased community engagement in education management as part of the process of strengthening community resolve to participate in the education process.
- Formulation of strategies to reduce access barriers at higher levels as this phenomenon acts as a disincentive to sending children to school.
- Completion of the school mapping exercise to provide a comprehensive database on what needs to be done in specific locations with regard to increasing access, improving enrolment and retention.

These propositions from the sector review report allude to the fact that in spite of an elaborate policy framework and a well

designed Education Strategic Plan, the sector is still bedevilled by a number of challenges that need to be addressed.

The challenges of the educational sector are well documented and discussed. But, the right-mix of approaches, are yet to be developed towards addressing the critical issues. In addition, there is a lack of political will to commit more resources to educational development at the basic level. These and other factors tend to undermine the attainment of the commitment of government to achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA).

A critical review of the policy also reveals placement of emphasis on reducing gender disparity in education. Reducing gender disparity in terms of enrolment and retention without addressing the underlying causes of the problems creating gender disparity is not an effective way to improving access to education for the girl-child. As observed in the sector review report of 2004, it is important to fully consider the factors influencing enrolment and retention at the primary level.²

The ISODEC/NOVIB Girl-Child Education Project (GCEP), which was designed and implemented from 1999 to 2004, sort to help provide the mechanisms for addressing the challenges in the sector. In addition, the GCEP was designed with a view to mobilising local level support for promoting girl-child education in the country. The project played a catalytic role by ensuring that all stakeholders were part of the process of change envisaged.

Factors Affecting Girl-Child Education

The formulation of the project was based on a critical assessment of the situation in the project area. Based on the information gathered, mechanisms for addressing the issues were designed. The data collection process involved the use of participatory tools. Data was collected from the Districts and selected communities.

¹ MoEYS (2004), p.117-119

² MoEYS (2004), p. 118)

An analysis of the data showed that a number of factors contribute to lack of access to good quality education for the girl-child. The key factors identified were used as justification for the proposal submitted to NOVIB for funding support. Some of the factors identified included:

- Poverty and low incomes at both the household and community level affected the ability of parents to pay for the education of the girl-child.
- The girls were also found to be more vulnerable as they are more susceptible to pregnancy. In addition, parents who find it difficult to manage their girl-child give them out for marriages at an early age. In some situations, the girls are given out to relatives and other people as house-helpers.
- There is a lack of motivation on the part of parents to send the girl-child to school because of the perception that opportunities for them were limited. In addition, the girl children were also not motivated to remain in school as they lacked a clear understanding of the opportunities available to them after completing school.
- Infrastructure constraints
- Bias and discrimination – workload, low social value of the girl etc.
- The school environment – caliber of teachers, existing facilities etc. lack of adequate structures and furniture serve as disincentive to parents and would rather prefer to have the children at home to assist with other activities.
- The poor quality of instruction due to lack of instructional materials and the teaching methods used contributed towards poor performance, thus de-motivating parents from sending children, particularly the girl-child to school.

These problems greatly contributed to the low level of enrolment and retention of the girl-child. They also contributed to the poor performance of girls in school. Reducing gender disparity requires the design of strategies that will contribute towards addressing or reducing the impact of these issues on the girl-child. It is the need for reducing the impact that the GCEP was

formulated with clearly defined goals, objectives and strategies.

The Direction Taken

As discussed earlier, the GCEP was implemented in two phases. The first phase focused on five Districts in two regions. The second phase was used to consolidate project activities in the two regions while expanding to the Northern and Upper East Regions. In view of the fact that the two phases dovetailed into each other, the goals, objectives and strategies used during the two phases were not drastically different.

Project Goals

The GCEP had two main goals and these are:

- To strengthen the capacities of the five participating districts to totally take over the project by mainstreaming it into their various development plans.
- To help create, strengthen and sustain access of the girl-child in two districts in the Upper East and one in the Northern regions of Ghana, to good quality educational opportunities.

Project Objectives

To help contribute towards attainment of the project goals, the following objectives were designed. These were:

- To develop and implement an effective capacity building strategy that aims at developing the knowledge and skill base of all relevant stakeholders in the old districts to fully take over the implementation of the project.
- To encourage active collaboration among stakeholders in the promotion of good quality education in general and the participation of girls in particular. This includes regular stakeholder forums on education.
- To promote attitudinal change in target communities about the benefits of girl-child education and basic human rights, including disability rights through public education activities and gender orientation of educational authorities. This also includes lobbying to have by-laws gazetted.

- To promote an enjoyable and democratic school environment for pupils, teachers and parents.
 - To promote activities that will ensure a further increase of enrolment of girls, high retention ratios and high transition ratios from primary to secondary levels. This includes putting in place mechanisms that will facilitate the return of dropout girls where possible.
 - To provide capacity support to the Assemblies / Ghana Education Service (GES) to enable them monitor progress in enrolment, attendance, quality and education achievements long after ISODEC has phased out.
 - To continue to award scholarships to brilliant but needy girls and to stimulate activities which promote education of the girl-child.
 - To continue to promote advocacy and networking activities aimed at improving and creating appropriate environment favourable to the educational needs of the girl-child including the disabled ones.
 - To develop linkage between parents of scholarship beneficiaries and micro-credit service providers in the various districts to improve their income base.
- institutionalisation of the project within the District Assemblies
 - provision of support to the GES to deliver on its mandate
 - establishment of criteria for identification of girls to benefit from the endowment fund
 - creation of girl-child study clubs
 - identification and training of facilitators to support the girl-child clubs
 - working with beneficiary parents
 - involvement of traditional rulers in the promotion of girl-child education
 - Awareness creation on the need to give equal opportunities to both girls and boys
 - provision of educational materials
 - support to reactivation of PTAs and SMCs
 - building the capacity of various stakeholders involved in the project delivery process.

Project Strategies

The project was designed within the framework of ISODEC's rights-based approach to addressing poverty on a long-term basis. In line with this, the design focused on creating demand for good quality education by empowering communities to participate in education sector activities. Another dimension was improving the response capability of the District Assemblies in the delivery of education development services that address the needs and aspirations of the communities.

Achieving this two-pronged approach involved institution of mechanisms that promote transparency and inclusiveness in the project delivery process. The key mechanisms used included:

Conclusion

The discussion in this section involves an exploration of the issues that prompted the design of the GCEP. In the first place, the policy environment in Ghana provided a conducive atmosphere for intervening in the sector. Government recognises the challenges faced in the implementation of the FCUBE policy and attainment of the EFA goals. The challenge has been adoption of the appropriate strategies. ISODEC took up the challenge by first researching into the problems confronting girl-child education in the selected project areas. Armed with the information, different strategies were developed to guide implementation of the project. The project design was, therefore, based on adoption of a holistic approach to addressing the core problems confronting the girl-child.

For purposes of providing a deeper understanding of how the change envisaged was propelled, the strategies used are discussed in the next section. The idea is to demonstrate that working towards attaining policy objectives requires the use of approaches that reinforce each other.

Part Four

4. Using GCEP to Make the Wheels Turn

Promoting Inclusiveness and Ownership

The collection of data for the design of the project involved intensive interaction with the District Assemblies, Ghana Education Service and community-level stakeholders. The process used served as an empowering tool as it helped to expose the situation on the ground. The participation of other stakeholders also ensured their perceptions were taken into consideration in the design of the project.

Before start-up of project interventions, consultations were held in all the beneficiary districts to discuss the scope of the project and the various types of activities to be implemented. To ensure there is consistency in the approaches developed, the project was piloted for six (6) months in the Brong Ahafo and Ashanti Regions. The six-month period was used as a strategy to gain the support required for effective implementation of the various activities.

Another mechanism used to promote inclusiveness and acceptance of the project was the development of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU served as the bond between the Partner District Assemblies and ISODEC. It spelt out the roles and responsibilities of each party. The level of participation in the development of the MOU is the element to look at.

ISODEC prepared a draft MOU, distributed it to the various District Assemblies to review and make their inputs. Comments received were used to revise the document which was re-circulated to all the District Assemblies. Before the MOUs were signed, a team from ISODEC visited all the Districts during which a cross-section of stakeholders, were invited to input into the document. The views expressed were then used to prepare a final document. The exciting aspect of the process was that the MOUs were tailored to meet the

aspirations of the various districts. Thus, though the MOU contained generic areas of interest, certain components were adjusted to take into consideration the peculiarities of the various Districts.

The import of the approach is, though there is the need to cement a partnership relationship through the mechanism of an MOU, there is the need to ensure the process is collectively owned. It also affirms that expanding inclusiveness in the decision-making process helps to promote a greater sense of ownership. The sense of ownership exhibited in the field is captured in comments such as *“it is our responsibility to ensure educational facilities provide good quality services and ISODEC is only playing a catalytic role.”* Another comment was that *“we were part of the process of developing the project and we made inputs into the MOU and so we do not see the project as an imposition from ISODEC.”*

Gaining Commitment of Stakeholders

Working with District Assemblies

The project implementation process was based on the recognition that by law, the District Assemblies have the mandate to provide good quality services to the people, including the poor and marginalised. By virtue of the roles and responsibilities prescribed by law, the District Assemblies act as the executive and legislative arm of Government at the district level and therefore the highest decision making bodies. Recognising the central role played by the District Assemblies in the socio-economic transformation of the communities, ISODEC strategically worked with them to implement the GCEP in project districts. The District Assemblies were supported to set up the District Management Teams (DMTs) with an official of the DA appointed as the Desk Officer for the project.

The composition of the DMTs was the prerogative of the DAs. The DAs identified the various departments to be represented but the GES was an automatic member. The DMT was also chaired by the District Chief Executive (DCE). The DMT was charged with the responsibility of planning and managing the project process in line with the strategies designed. The DMTs also established sub-committees to enhance the quality of service delivery under the project. ISODEC's participation in the planning process was geared towards providing on-site support. The level of participation decreased overtime, as the DMTs became more confident in managing the process.

Directly institutionalising the project within the DAs, coupled with the level of involvement in the design process, helped to build confidence in the relationship established. The increased confidence also led to increased commitment from the DAs. Though the DAs continuously referred to the project as ISODEC supported, there was also the recognition that the DAs owned the project.

The funding mechanisms introduced further helped to promote a high sense of commitment as the DAs realised a gradual increase in the level of their responsibilities and commitment over the years. The funding arrangement as outlined in the MOUs, was based on a cost-sharing mechanism where the level of funding from ISODEC decreased on a yearly basis while that of the DAs increased by the same margin.

In addition to gaining commitment, working with the District Assemblies provided the opportunity for ISODEC to influence educational policy-making and implementation at the district level. The focus was therefore broadening the level participation in the policy process as well as ensuring District Assemblies live up to their responsibilities by co-funding project activities.

Widening Participation

As recognised by the education sector policy framework, provision of good quality education entails both a demand and supply side. Working with the DAs was a first step towards ensuring responsiveness on the supply side. The demand side of the equation comes from community members and their institutions. In view of this, the level of participation in the project process was widened to include other stakeholders that can influence children's access to quality education. For the first time in the project areas, community members and traditional rulers were represented on the DMTs and they actively participated in project planning and implementation. Other structures created to enhance the level of participation were the Community Management Teams (CMTs), the Girl-Child Study Clubs, Beneficiary Parent Associations etc.

By broadening participation in the real sense of the concept, the project gained the commitment it desired. Local stakeholders were an integral part of the planning, monitoring and evaluating all project activities. It cannot, however, be said that a complete sense of ownership by communities was generated. This is because other elements which promote ownership at that level such as design of action plans and taking action to demand for good quality education services were not rooted by the end of the project.

In spite of this, implementation of activities was driven by stakeholders at the unit and community levels. The implementation process was participatory and this provided an opportunity for all the stakeholders to be involved in decision-making. They were represented in the sub-committees of the DMTs. The other stakeholders, including members of the Girl-Child Clubs, participated in the quarterly and annual review meetings to assess the progress of the project and to draw up plans of action for the year.

- supply of basic textbooks to schools, particularly in the north

Motivation through Incentives

It is widely recognised that one of the mechanisms for ensuring increased enrolment and retention of girls in school is through the introduction of an incentive package.³ In line with this perspective the GCEP had the provision of scholarships as an incentive for encouraging enrolment and retention of the girl-child. The scholarship scheme was administered through the DMTs.

Selection Process

The focus of the scholarship scheme was to target brilliant/determined but needy children. In view of this, a selection process was instituted in all the schools involved with the project. The basic process used was identification of girls who were performing well in class but were from poor homes. Identification of poor parents was based on knowledge of the child's background. Teachers selected the potential beneficiaries and submitted the list to the DMTs. In some Districts, identified students were asked to apply for assistance through their parents. In those Districts, the applications were forwarded to the DMTs through the GES Circuit Supervisors.

Once the list is forwarded, the DMT sub-committees responsible visited the schools to interview and/or test the selected students and pupils. The parents were also interviewed as part of the assessment process and to be sure they are actually poor. The process also involved talking to selected opinion leaders and a few of the school children.

Scholarship Package

The incentive package provided included the following:

- provision of school uniform
- supply of exercise books
- school bags
- payment of school fees
- payment of examination fees

Funding of the Scheme

The scheme was funded by both ISODEC and the District Assemblies. The District Assemblies set up an endowment fund lodged in a separate bank account. Once the number of beneficiaries was agreed upon, the two parties paid their contributions into the account, to which ISODEC was a signatory. This arrangement helped to ensure effective use of the resources. It helped to improve the level of accountability.

The scholarship/endowment fund scheme contributed greatly to ensuring the girl-child beneficiaries remained in school. It also helped to create awareness on the need to address the poverty level of the people to enhance their participation in the the provision of social services like education.

What did not happen, was to get communities to set up mechanisms for contributing towards the endowment fund. This was not factored into the project at the design stage. In spite of this, the introduction of the incentive package fitted into one of the criteria for its use as a strategy to promote girl-child education. That is, the cost of schooling is a significant (but not necessarily the only) barrier to education of the girl-child.⁴ As discussed earlier, poverty within families and in the communities were found to affect education of the girl-child.

Breaking Socio-cultural Barriers

Culturally, girl-children are ascribed various roles and responsibilities which have an effect on their schooling. As observed in the 1992 GLSS report, girls are over-burdened at least 20% of their time than boys. The result is that girls are more likely to be dropped out of school than boys. In situations where the level of household income is low, decisions on who should go to school favour the boy.

In addition, socio-cultural factors result in stereotyping and the girl-child is subjected to

³ UNESCO (2004), p1

⁴ UNESCO (2004), p.1

discrimination. These factors have impacted negatively on the level of enrolment and retention of the girl-child and ultimately their performance. To address the problem, the GCEP was designed with a view to creating awareness within all the stakeholders.

The awareness creation drive focused on the need to send the girl-child to school, ensure they remain in school and are provided with the necessary support to motivate the girl-child to improve on their performance. In addition, the awareness creation initiative focused on changing attitudes of community members and the District Assembly towards educating the girl-child. The approach adopted helped to expose the benefits of educating girl-children to the family, the community and the individual girl. The responsibility for awareness creation was that of the DMT and other stakeholders such as traditional authorities.

Having Fun while Learning

The formation of the study clubs was one of the incentive packages used to ensure increased enrolment and retention of the girl-child. Membership was free and opened to all girls in the school. The clubs were used as a platform for educating the girls on issues affecting their lives, how to manage challenging situations and the need to focus on their education. The clubs further served as an avenue for creating awareness on the benefits to be derived from education.



Study Club Members in Ahafo Ano North District

The mechanisms used to achieve these included:

- organisation of extra classes for members of the club

- participation in quiz competitions within and between schools
- broadening knowledge on basic reproductive health issues including HIV/AIDS and environmental sanitation
- sending members of the clubs on study tours to selected educational and historic places to expose them to how women work in various environments
- Promoting interaction between the girls and women who have excelled in life and are occupying prominent positions in their work places.
- Use of the clubs for creating awareness within the communities on the need to send the girl-child to school

The study clubs have gained popularity in the communities and parents willingly support their girls to participate in the activities organised. The increased interest in studying at home and in smaller groups has also excited parents.

From the perspectives of the girls, the study tours were the most exciting activities undertaken. One participant observed “*we had the opportunity to see the type of guns used by Yaa Asantewaa and we also entered an aeroplane.*” This level of excitement notwithstanding, the girls found the educational aspects very rewarding. Their exposure to girl’s schools and establishments headed by women challenged them. It was therefore not surprising during interactions to hear the girls stating they would want to become doctors, presidents, directors and others.

Building Community Change Agents

The management of basic schools is supposed to be the responsibility of both GES through the teachers and the communities. It is the need to increase the level of involvement of communities in the management of schools that PTAs were formed in all schools. To further improve community-school relationship, the concept

of school management teams (SMCs) was muted and implemented. Unfortunately, most PTAs and SMCs became dysfunctional due to a number of reasons. The basic ones are lack of skills and knowledge. In addition, there is a lack of the impetus on the part of school authorities to make the PTAs and SMCs effective.



Queen Mother as Agent of Change

Through the GCEP initiative, the PTAs and SMCs in beneficiary schools and communities were reactivated. The idea was to make them more vibrant and to get them deeply involved with the promotion of GCEP. To enhance their participation, the strategy adopted was the creation of the Beneficiary Parents' Associations (BPAs). The BPA members are members of the PTAs but, it was more prudent to work through a smaller group so they act as change agents at the community level. The BPAs were provided with capacity building support to increase their knowledge base on girl-child education and on issues of rights of the child. The educational support provided increased their understanding and level of participation in the project.

The mechanism worked to a limited extent. This is because other forms of support that would have made the BPAs a vibrant group was not provided. The BPAs needed skills in basic facilitation and mobilisation, a deeper understanding of the issues related to girl-child education and other skills that would have built their confidence. But these were not provided. In view of this, they could not propel the level of change anticipated.

In spite of the above, evidence available pointed to the fact that the BPAs were the agents that helped to propel the revamping of the PTAs and SMCs. Teachers in the various schools testified to the positive role played by the BPAs.

Livelihood Diversification

The BPAs were used to help draw attention to the need to increase the income level of parents, in order to enhance the level of enrolment and retention of the girl-child. The BPAs were again used as the vehicle by providing them with skills in management of small scale enterprises. The BPAs also received training in new skill areas such as soap and tie and dye making. These skills were geared towards helping the members diversify their livelihood sources. Though there are limitations on these kinds of activities, the learning point from the initiative is that promoting girl-child education should involve a holistic approach. That is an approach that focuses on addressing not only socio-cultural barriers, but also seeks to expand the level of inclusiveness as well as increasing the income levels of parents. The poverty situation is more fundamental in denying girls' access to education than any other factor. Addressing the underlying causes of poverty is therefore central to improving enrolment, retention and performance of the girl-child.

Increasing Operational Capability

The key actors involved with delivery of education sector services at the District level rests with the DAs and GES. Operationally, GES is the prime mover in the sector. But, what has not been factored into the implementation of the sector policy is helping stakeholders to understand the gender dimensions of education. In addition, education delivery is not looked at from the perspectives of rights, but a service that is central to socio-economic development.

The GCEP was used to break barriers by ensuring that the focal point for the delivery of service is the District Assembly. GES continued to play its traditional role of lead implementing agency in the sector. Through the GCEP, all stakeholders were provided with various types of capacity building support. Members of the DMTs, which is a

multi-sectoral management body, were trained in:

- the project concept
- on issues related to rights of the child to education
- facilitation of community level discussions using participatory tools
- community mobilisation
- planning and budgeting
- other areas that enhanced the quality of project delivery.

The capacity building initiatives did not only result in the acquisition of new skills and knowledge, but helped to build the confidence of the members of the DMTs.

Linked to this, was the direct support provided to the GES to enhance the performance of its monitoring and supervisory roles. The GES circuit officers and facilitators in the schools were beneficiaries of the capacity building process. In addition, the circuit supervisors were provided with fuel on a weekly basis, to enable them move round their areas of coverage. The quantum of fuel provided was not enough to cover daily runs, but was catalytic enough to inspire the supervisors to perform their duties.

The critical element in the process is the need to ensure key actors have the requisite skills, knowledge and logistics to work with. Motivation is crucial to achieving results. The project has demonstrated that providing operational motivation, beyond salary increases or allowances, could propel the kind of responses expected of agencies established to deliver specified goods.

Decentralisation and Decongestion

One of the core elements for ensuring sustainable democracy and development is focusing on the lowest levels of decision-making. The lowest level for decision-making under the decentralisation programme is the unit committees. However, because the implementation of the decentralisation policy

receives lip-service attention, the unit committees have become ineffective⁵. The study under reference further notes that the District Assemblies face a number of challenges and these have affected their ability to transform the lives of people in rural communities.

Recognising the challenges posed at the district level with regard to planning and implementing development initiatives, the key strategy adopted was to work with DAs. The creation of the DMT was therefore a step towards contributing towards synchronisation of plans at that level. GES, which is the main body responsible for educational development at that level, was a member of the DMT and therefore had to submit its activities on the GCEP to that body for approval. By adopting this approach, the GCEP demonstrated that decentralised planning could be achieved if given the necessary political support and commitment in terms of funding.

Another dimension of the strategy was the involvement of other agencies outside the GES. Traditionally, the single sector approach adopted has been one of the mechanisms used to delay full decentralisation. The institutional arrangement put in place diffused the myth by bringing on board other decentralised departments. Thus, decongesting the work GES would have done.



Multi-sectoral Stakeholders Working Together

⁵ ISSER/IIED (2000), p.15

The outcome was, girl-child education became a collective responsibility rather than that of the GES alone. It was this approach that helped the CHIRAJ in Ahafo Ano North to intervene to protect the interest and rights of a girl taken out of school and married out. This is just one of the experiences gained from joint implementation of a project, which goes beyond the usual collaborative arrangements.

Flexibility in Approach

The beauty of a process is the level of flexibility adopted. The GCEP focused on improving enrolment, retention and performance of the girl-child and increased access to basic education on the one hand. On the other, the GCEP was to ensure the processes are mainstreamed within the district assembly system. There was no straight jacket approach developed for achieving these. Rather, the GCEP was used to test a number of concepts.

Some of these concepts as discussed in the previous sections included:

- adopting a livelihoods framework through the work with the BPAs
- placing emphasis on a people-centred approach by working on the attitudes and perceptions of community members and institutions of government
- increasing the level of responsiveness of stakeholders by engaging at multi-levels – community, school, DAs etc.

The flexibility in approach adds credence to the argument that unless there are fundamental internal changes within the main delivery organisation, there will be little or no change in their external relationships with users of the services, and thus no sustained change in access or influence over key livelihood assets.⁶ By focusing on attitudinal changes, GCEP was actually promoting both internal changes in the DAs and GES as well as within community institutions which are external to the service providers. GCEP was therefore working towards ensuring long-term sustainability of girl-child education.

Gender Dimensions of GCEP

The GCEP by its design and focus can be said to be gender insensitive and in deed, boys in the schools complained about being left out in the scheme of things. The boys had genuine complaints as the scholarship scheme, the girl-child clubs and holiday classes were designed to target the girl-child.



Boy with Special Need - Beneficiary of scholarship

But, the reality on the ground is that the GCEP challenged the boys and the other girls not benefiting from the scholarship schemes alike. All students were motivated to improve their performance with the hope of benefiting from the scholarships in future.

The direct support provided to the GES to improve supervision and monitoring and training of teachers benefited other students, including boys. In some of the communities, holiday classes were organised separately for both boys and girls while in others, both boys and girls sat in the class. In a few situations, boys with special needs were considered for the scholarship schemes and they participated in the activities of the girl-child clubs. Community members also encouraged their wards, both boys and girls to learn hard so they could become beneficiaries in future. The teachers in some of the schools, particularly in the Northern and Upper East Regions that were supplied with essential textbooks used the books to the benefit of all the pupils.

⁶ ODI (2000), p.8

The GCEP was a process project that facilitated change. Though the focus was on the girl-child, the import was to test approaches that will lead to increased access to good quality education for all children. In view of this, the project outcomes were not limited to the beneficiary girls.

Sustainability and Exit Strategies

The project process had always been challenged to demonstrate how it can be sustained after the initial support. The first phase of the project (1999 – 2002) was critically assessed and the question of sustainability was raised. The second phase (2002 – 2004) therefore resulted in the introduction of more concrete steps towards ensuring the mechanisms are sustained. The MOU was revised and the terms included a clearly defined exit strategy.

The MOU explicitly indicated that the responsibilities of the DAs would increase as the project moved towards the end of its life. In line with this, the formula for funding the project was mutually agreed upon. The funding arrangement agreed upon was based on a cost-sharing arrangement. The arrangement was based on 70:30 in year one, 50:50 in year 2, 30:70 in year 3 and 0:100 thereafter for ISODEC and DAs respectively.

Available information indicates in spite of difficulties faced by the DAs in terms of release of the District Assembly Common Fund, they exhibited a lot of commitment to the arrangements agreed upon. The DAs were also expected to include the strategies in their development plans. The idea was for DAs to consciously plan for providing support to girl-child education. The districts where phase one was implemented, incorporated some aspects in their development plans. The key focus in those plans was infrastructure development and increasing the number of teachers. Due to this focus, the DA budgets were over-stretched and therefore could not have effectively covered support to GCE. In spite of this, the DAs consistently paid their contributions to the joint project account.

Another approach adopted to ensure eventual sustainability of the project was the introduction of quarterly and annual review mechanisms. The review process was used to build capacity on how to assess project performance, thereby providing the stakeholders opportunity to define the pathway for improving delivery of the outcomes.

The participatory tools such as SWOT Analysis used during the reviews promoted self-reflection and therefore a deeper understanding of the emerging issues. As the project years passed on, ISODEC strategically withdrew from directly participating in the review meetings and workshops. The withdrawal was part of the mechanism used to ensure project partners developed the confidence and ability to work on their own. Ultimately, the partners will be better positioned to continue practising the processes introduced.

Conclusion

Turning of the wheels is about using GCEP to promote change within the DAs and other decentralised institutions. It is also about supporting attitudinal changes formed as a result of socio-cultural practices. The discussion has revealed that it is not enough to state in a policy the need for reducing gender disparity in education. Achieving increased levels of girls' enrolment, their retention and performance, calls for adoption of a mix of approaches.

The GCEP has demonstrated that appropriate mechanisms for ensuring inclusiveness of all stakeholders, is a necessary condition for attaining policy objectives. In addition, it is not just enough to adopt an open door approach. Gaining the commitment of stakeholders to the change envisaged is equally essential. There is no doubt that one of the factors affecting girl-child education is the level of poverty in communities and within families.

The cost of education (both direct and opportunity cost) combined with socio-cultural influences, contribute towards decision-making in favour of boys. Putting in processes that support increased livelihood

sources, contributes greatly towards addressing the problem of girl-child education in Ghana. The establishment of an incentive scheme in terms of scholarships also demonstrates the need to cushion parents in the drive towards increasing enrolment and retention of girls in school. Providing a good school environment is a necessary condition, but neglecting other aspects, could lead to under-utilisation of the existing infrastructure and facilities.

Motivation takes many forms and the approach used under the GCEP was to expose the girl-child to what happens outside their immediate environments. The study tours and other activities were therefore used to motivate the girls to remain in school.

The institutions responsible for service provision are specialised agencies. The agencies are expected to have the technical skills required. But, what is often over-looked is the need to introduce new ways of doing things. GCEP therefore moved a step forward by providing additional skills in community mobilisation, awareness creation and performance assessment. These skills, coupled with other forms of support provided, propelled the agencies to work harder than before.

Turning the wheels is a way of using triggers for promoting positive responses to policy goals. ISODEC, through the GCEP has demonstrated that an NGO could facilitate change within Government institutions. The GCEP has also been used as a vehicle for building multi-sectoral cooperation and support for a common goal. DAs have been challenged to demonstrate that they could use the Common Fund in a more cost-effective way in the fight against poverty by investing more on processes than on structures.

Part Five

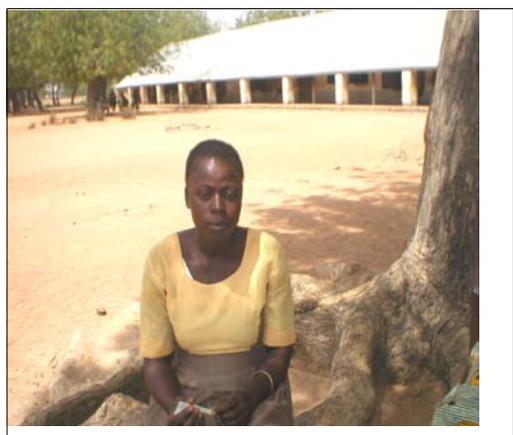
5. Wind of Change

The discussion in the previous section focused on the innovations introduced into the project. Though some of the outcomes of the process were outlined, these were not adequately captured. This section is therefore geared towards presenting the story from the perspectives of various categories of stakeholders. The section focuses on telling the story line as perceived by the stakeholders.

Remove Barriers to Formal Education

The GCEP encouraged head teachers to re-admit girls who dropped out for one reason or the other. This was part of the sensitisation process and the story below is from Binduri, Bawku Municipal Assembly area in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

The story is about Clara Atubillah who was a victim of culture, poverty and stereotyping. She dropped out of school and after many years, returned to continue her education. The opportunities created by GCEP helped her to get back to school.



Clara Atubillah Telling Her Story

I was in JSS with my brother but my mother had to take a decision as to who should continue after my father's death because she could no longer take care of both of us. The decision favoured my brother so he continued with his schooling. I dropped out and later got married to a teacher in another school. I had two kids and one died. My mother asked my husband to assist me learn a trade but he refused. My senior sister helped me by giving me a sewing machine so I went to learn tailoring for three years.

My brother who had then completed training college encouraged me to go back to school. When I discussed with my husband, he denied me the opportunity. So I returned to my community and discussed with the head teacher.

The head teacher indicated if I was ready, he would admit me. This is how I came back to school. I came back to the JSS and fortunately for me I got the scholarship and now I am in JSS 3. My child is also in Primary 1.

Clara' story also shows that attitudes of men can affect girls who for one reason or the other, miss out on their education. It further reveals that until the issue of drop outs is looked at from the perspectives of policy, children who fall out will find it difficult to get back into the school system. The issue of girl drop outs returning to school is often a discretionary decision of the head teacher. No mechanisms are in place to encourage girls like Clara to get back to school. Yet, huge amounts are spent to promote adult literacy under the guise of making them functionally literate.

A Tale of Many Cities

This case study is taken from Jejemereja Community in Jaman District, in the Brong Ahafo Region. The story is about Rose Fakyewaa who recounted her experiences

and how the support GCEP provided helped to get her to SSS. Generally, there is the recognition among various stakeholders that the GCEP contributed to the retention of children in school. The scholarship scheme and associated activities encouraged and motivated the girls a lot. Attending school regularly meant participation in the various activities organized by the girl-child clubs.

Rose Fakyewaa had come home to collect school fees and had the opportunity to meet with the data collection team. Her story goes as follows:

I am presently in SSS 1 in Our Lady Secondary School in Drobo. I came home to collect my remaining school fees. When I came I was told that my mother was at a meeting with ISODEC discussing girl-child education. The purpose of the discussion is about how our parents can support us improve on our performance.

The first thing I want to tell you is that when we were in the primary school in this community, I had to go out to cut firewood or look for mushroom to sell so I can contribute towards payment of my school fees as well as buy my books. The truth is, the school uniform I was wearing then was torn.

When I moved to JSS I was considered for the scholarship scheme and fortunately I became a beneficiary. The scholarship package included books, uniforms and school bags. The exciting aspect was that when we got to JSS 3, I was to pay as much as one hundred thousand cedis and all this was paid for me under the scholarship scheme. Later, they paid our examination fees and this how I managed to complete JSS.

At the beginning of the year, my father paid part of my fees for SSS1 and because of he still owed the school I have not been given textbooks. I have therefore come home to collect the balance left, which is about two-hundred and eighty thousand cedis.



Rose Fakyewaa, middle,

Rose's mother was asked how she was going to pay the rest of the fees to enable her daughter return to school. Her response was *we are now aware of the importance of educating our girl children. As a result, I and my husband will mobilize resources and even borrow so Rose can return to school. It is not going to be easy but, we have to ensure she remains in school.*

Rose's story reveals a number of things. These are:

- Increased awareness in communities on the need to educate girls
- The challenge for educating girl-children is greater as the children move up the educational ladder
- Retention in school involves increasing the ability of parents to pay fees.
- Access to education requires flexibility in policy implementation as denial to textbooks due to parents' inability to pay all fees is denial of the rights of the child to education.

Keep the Heart Beating

The Sekyere East District Assembly in the Ashanti Region is one of the deprived in the country. Some of the communities are inaccessible as they are located within the Afram Plains. The District is a beneficiary of the GCEP and their story is very clear and loud. For the District Officials, there is the need to keep the heart beating for a number of reasons.

The story taken from Sekyere East District, sums up the perceptions expressed by most Districts. This was particularly clear during a

workshop with all stakeholders after the evaluation of the GCEP. Participants expressed commitment to continue the project and called on all District Assemblies to develop plans, supported by budgetary allocation, to promote girl-child education. The challenge is how to keep the heart beating in all Districts in the country.

The reasons are contained in the story the DMT in Sekyere East told

For us, the GCEP is a good story of collaboration between an NGO and the DA. Before we talk about how we would continue the project, it is important to begin by looking at where we were before and where we are now. For us, the situation was nothing to right home about. But, to take a few examples, we are now sure there is room for improvement. The work done with the BPAs gives us hope as their empowerment will eventually lead to sustainability. It is in our interest to link them up to sources of credit.

The focus on girls and the exposure on gender issues have generated interest in ensuring women are adequately represented on various committees and the DA has created a sub-committee on women and children. In addition, the District Education Oversight Committee has been revamped and steps taken to arrest falling standards in education.

The District Assembly has become addictive to the GCEP due to its influence. In view of this, the DA is putting in place measures to ensure adequate budgetary allocations are made, will develop a DA policy on girl-child education and community level sensitisation will be continued. The policy will be developed in close collaboration with the GES Directorate in the District. In addition, scholarships will be continued while we strengthen our capacity to track beneficiaries. We have also realised that attitudinal changes must start from the family level so the woman can be liberated and become more confident and this requires focusing more on men during the sensitisation activities.

Conclusion

The discussion on the “Wind of Change” is a presentation of some of the positive effects of the GCEP. The case studies used are examples of the indicators used by stakeholders in assessing the impact of the GCEP on the lives of the people. It further helped to create an understanding of the level to which the attitudes of District Assemblies towards girl-child education and gender issues in general are changing. The case studies tell one side of the story.

The other side of the story is that the process initiated by GCEP is about changing attitudes. It is therefore important to note that six years is not enough to transform individual and institutional attitudes. There are many more people, particularly the men, whose attitudes affect the education of the girl-child most. Stories about failure of husbands to live up to their responsibilities were uncountable.

District Assemblies also vary in the degree of commitment to the process. Preference is often given to interventions that result in award of contracts because of the considerations embedded in the contract process. There are some of Ghana Education Service Directorates in the Districts that do not believe in collaboration in the delivery of education services. The GES Directorates still see education service delivery from a parochial perspective and cannot come to grips with other stakeholders participating. It was obvious that much as the GCEP introduced pooling of resources for girl-child education, the GES Directorates, with the enormous resources government releases, never directly contributed to the pool.

Pushing for changes in the delivery of education services that promote the rights of the child requires taking bold institutional reforms right from the centre of power. The national level institutions should and must commit themselves to ensuring decentralisation is implemented to the letter. Failure to do this will be killing the initiatives undertaken through the GPRS before they mature.

Part Six

6. Lessons and Experiences Gained

Scaling Up the Partnership

GCEP has been used to demonstrate that effective attainment of policy goals depends on scaling up the level of participation by different stakeholders. The critical issue in scaling up partnership involves creating a uniform playing field through which it becomes a win-win game for all those involved. Partnerships are more about “politics” of engagement that help to diffuse the perceptions held by each party about what they would either gain or lose.

The experience gained through the GCEP is that agencies like the GES are more reluctant to give up or share with others what they perceive as their core responsibilities and legitimate role. The feeling was that either their capacity and/or credibility were being challenged. It is therefore important to diffuse this kind of thinking in agencies through a concerted re-orientation exercise. It also requires promoting skills development in the use of participatory processes. The GES is an agency that requires injection of such skills.

Political Commitment Critical

Another experience gained in the implementation of the GCEP is that changes in political regimes and leadership often result in a shift in political attitudes and spaces for partnership. This was demonstrated after both the 2000 and 2004 elections. Political heads at the District level were changed in 2001 and this affected project implementation. It takes time to build new relationships and confidence in the partnership when such changes occur. It is therefore important to institutionalise interventions so they can be sustained even when political leadership changes.

In spite of the observations made, it also emerged that committed leadership played a major role in ensuring smooth implementation of the project process. From national level, there is a commitment towards closing the gender gaps in education and this motivated District Chief Executives to take up the challenges posed by the GCEP.

Communication and Coordination

The success story behind GCEP is attributable to the mechanism used. The inception of the project was based on the needs of the districts. Data collected at the district level was effectively communicated to all stakeholders. The adequate and timely release of information helped the Districts gain an understanding of the issues confronting them with regard to girl-child education. In addition, communities were exposed to the outcomes of the data collected and this challenged them.

It is also important to create mechanisms for coordination of project interventions. The establishment of the DMTs and Desk Officers in the District Assemblies created the platform for coordination. The DMT concept brought all sector agencies in the District together in the delivery of education services. By expanding participation in education service delivery, it helped to expose that attaining sector objectives is not the responsibility of the GES or the sector agency alone. Other agencies are relevant even when their mandates do not cover activities in the sector where interventions are implemented.

Focus on direct and indirect costs

Factors affecting the delivery of sector objectives include both direct and indirect costs. The direct costs are those

involving payment of school fees and other forms of levies. The indirect costs, on the other hand, are the opportunity cost to parents for enrolling their children in school. The two combined, affect the ability of parents to educate their children and the girl-child in particular.

GCEP took a two-pronged approach to improving access to education for the girl-child. The first step was the creation of the endowment fund in partnership with the District Assemblies. The fund was used to cushion parents from some of the direct costs associated with educating the girl-child. The second step involved community awareness creation on the long-term benefits of girl-child education. The two-pronged approach helped to challenge parents to retain their girl-child in school even when not all girls benefited from the scholarships offered.

Managing Negligent Male Attitudes

One key factor identified as affecting girl-child education is socio-cultural factors. The project implementation process revealed that women are more likely to send the girl-child to school and support them to remain in school. The challenge faced by mothers is the attitude of their husbands. In some of the project areas, it was obvious that the failure of husbands to assist with the education of the girl-child resulted in their high drop out rates. The men generally neglect their responsibilities and make the education of the girl-child the burden of the woman. The women are overburdened and when they are unable to cope with the situation, the children have

to drop out. Eventually, the girls become the victims when decisions are to be taken as to whether the boy or girl should remain in school.

Conclusion

The discussion has revealed that the implementation of the policy on education for all requires adoption of strategies that help to promote decentralisation of the governance system in the country. Focusing mainly on the appropriate agencies established for service delivery creates division and diverts attention. There is also the need to ensure effective communication particularly at the District level. When people are equipped with the necessary tools, they are more likely to participate and demand good quality services are delivered by the agencies responsible. The present approach of pushing resources for the provision of social services requires increasing the level of transparency in the discharge of those responsibilities. In addition, the level of transformation expected, requires political commitment at all levels of government. Another dimension is adopting a holistic approach towards addressing the underlying factors affecting enrolment, retention and performance of the child. Piecemeal approaches are not sustainable and therefore not pro-poor in character. Reducing gender disparity in education also requires action targeted at the men in order to reduce the burden on mothers and therefore the high drop rates for girls.

Part Seven

7. Implication for Actors in the Sector

The GCEP experience has helped to expose a number of issues that need to be taken up by the actors in the sector. The actors identified are the Government (all levels), the international development partners and civil society organisations. The challenge is more on the civil society groups as they act as the third arm of the chair and therefore very critical to the sustainability of development initiatives.

In addition, the documentation of the GCEP with the title “**it is possible**” seeks to demonstrate that hope is not lost in the effort to increase access to and quality of education for the girl-child. The challenge, though, is how to mix the strategies required for improving access to and quality of education in Ghana, particularly for the girl-child. ISODEC has rightly adopted the rights-based approach to development and is working towards developing a programme dubbed *Rights-based Advocacy II*.

The move towards RBAII means ISODEC perceives the provision of social goods and services as a right and not a privilege. The implication is Government has a responsibility to ensure the rights of the people to good quality services are protected. Civil society groups believing in the rights-based approach have an obligation to protect those rights.

But, effectively protecting the rights of the people requires new ways of working and this goes beyond service provision. Demonstrating that “it is possible”, is one approach used by ISODEC. There are other approaches and by combining these with demonstrations as done through the GCEP, eventually leads to change in attitude of political office holders and decision-makers.

Expectation from Policy-makers

Advocacy is about influencing and ensuring policy-makers take the right decisions that impact on the well-being of the people. Rights-based advocacy is about ensuring policies formulated and plans implemented lead to attainment of the economic, political, social and cultural rights of the people. It is also recognition that development initiatives must be implemented with the understanding that the people of this country have the right to live a life of dignity.

The implication for policy-makers is that there is the need to be committed to promoting the rights of the people. The commitment should be demonstrated through resource allocation as outlined in the budget statements. Policy makers also need the political will to take decisions that ensure the people of this country live a life of dignity.

Both political commitment and allocating the resources to sectors that will improve the economic, social and cultural rights of the people is critical. GCEP has demonstrated that it is possible to gain political commitment at the District level. GCEP has further indicated that District Assemblies, given the right support and encouragement, can apply the resources at their disposal towards attainment of the rights of the people. The biggest question to ask is: *are the politicians committed to promoting the economic, social and cultural rights of the people?*

Civil Society Role

The answer to this question is difficult to get for a number of reasons. It is because civil society participation in the policy and resource allocation processes in the country, though important, is not easy for government to accept. Civil society groups have demonstrated they have a pro-poor

development agenda. They have also built trust for the work they do and are seen to be closer to communities where poverty is pervasive than government institutions. The challenge for civil society is how to take advantage of the goodwill it has, to lead the crusade towards promoting the rights of the people, particularly that of the poor and marginalised.

Policies that lead to improved economic status of the people, particularly those in the rural areas, have multiplier effects on the people having access to other services. The implication is policies that affect the economic wellbeing of the people such as deregulation and uncontrolled liberalisation of the trade regime must be resisted. In addition, civil society has to ensure policies on social service provision such as health, water and sanitation and education are backed with adequate resources through the budget process.

Achieving this implies civil society has to engage in the budget process. Engagement in the budget process requires critical analysis and review of the budget statement, participation in its implementation and monitoring and evaluating the impact of budget on the lives of the people. Feeding the outcomes back to policy makers and the people, provides the opportunity to solicit the political commitment required for ensuring the economic, social and cultural rights of the people are protected through the policy process.

For civil society, the questions to be answered are:

- *What capacity exists within civil society to engage in the policy process as well as undertake budget monitoring?*
- *Does civil society have the skills and knowledge to undertake evidence-based advocacy using rights-based approaches.*

The implication is civil society capacity has to be assessed. Based on the outcome, strategies for enhancing civil society engagement in the policy process could be designed.

Working and Walking with the People

Both Government and Civil society have the responsibility for ensuring that they do not just work for and on behalf of the people, but have to walk along with the people, particularly the poor and marginalised. The GCEP played a catalytic role by demonstrating that walking with the people is as critical as promoting their economic, social and cultural rights.

Walking with the people entails providing the people with information, knowledge and skills required for taking informed decisions. The mechanism also involves developing community capacity to participate in the decision-making process and to demand for accountability from public officials. The advocacy initiatives of civil society organisations should lead to empowerment of the people so they can engage in the governance process and ensure there is transparency in the decision-making process. Working for and walking with the people is also a mechanism for building a critical mass of support towards formulation of pro-poor policies.

Conclusion

The promotion of good governance and increased citizen participation in decision-making is a challenge that confronts both Government and civil society alike. Government needs to make a commitment towards upholding the economic, social and cultural rights of the poor. Civil society has to influence the process but will need to build capacity to undertake evidence-based advocacy. Linked to this, is the need to empower the poor and their institutions so they can play a lead role in the fight against poverty. Empowering communities is the most sustainable approach to poverty reduction. GCEP has demonstrated that expanding the

livelihood opportunities available to poor people increases their access to good quality education.

Part Eight

7. Action Now

The implementation of GCEP by ISODEC is a litmus test for how policy could be implemented. GCEP has also showed that every intervention should have attainment of the rights of the people at the background. With this type of perspective, it becomes easier to design mechanism for involving the people in the management of the interventions.

“It is possible” is meant to stir response from civil society groups working in the development arena. It is also a challenge to Government to be more proactive towards addressing the needs and aspirations of the people. The critical issue to note is that it is not about creating a dividing line between government and civil society organisations. Rather, it emphasis the need to work together towards attainment of the economic, social and cultural rights of the people. Working in partnership is the key to upholding the rights of the citizenry.

The move towards sustaining democratic principles in the country, calls for efforts to promote transparency in the governance system. Democratic principles also call for widening the space for participation in the decision-making process. It goes beyond participation in the electoral processes.

The challenge is how to move the processes of governance beyond casting of ballots to including the people in taking decisions that affect their livelihoods and wellbeing. Broadening participation requires a belief in and a commitment towards decentralised decision-making processes. Much as there seems to be a commitment through the existing legal framework, the practice is that the majority of the people

are not consulted when it comes to policy formulation.

The mode of delivery of services under the District Assembly system, do not create the space required for effective participation. GCEP was used as a vehicle for creating space for multi-stakeholder participation in the implementation of the education sector policy. By so doing, the GCEP has helped to demystify the concept that because of the high levels of illiteracy, the majority of the people cannot engage in policy implementation.

After six years of working with District Assemblies to support girl-child education, attitudes towards planning have not changed much. The situation is demonstration that a concerted and consistent effort is required over a long-period of time in order to attain the responses required. It is therefore important to ensure that the mechanism for planning that promote inclusiveness, are embedded within the District Assembly system.

Unless this is done, the government and its agencies will be providing lip-service without actually believing in the principle of participation. Failure to adhere to the tenets of peoples' participation in the development process is tantamount to closing the space for engagement. The ultimate effect is denial of the rights of the people and therefore a contravention of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana and other international conventions.

The people of Ghana have a collective responsibility to uphold the constitution and to defend it. Civil society exists to act as a watch-dog to safeguard the rights of the people. Adopting the rights-based approach is therefore a tool for

ensuring that government provides social and economic goods as of right of the people and not a need. By undertaking rights-based advocacy, civil society is tasking itself to understand the issues that affect the people and then adopting strategies for engagement with the Government.

“It is possible” is a clear demonstration of how civil society can engage government. The engagement with government started with the design of the project through its implementation to monitoring and evaluation. The process of engagement continues with an exposition of the challenges faced and what needs to be done to ensure the Ghanaian child has access to good quality education. The mechanism used is to expose to policy-makers that achieving policy objectives requires adoption of a mix of approaches. The Government’s own review of the Education Sector policy in 2004 confirms what **“it is possible”** is talking about.