

Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and Deutsche Welle present

Choices – A Feature on Girl Child Education in Ghana

Take Song „Get your girl child to school“

Education is a human right. In the Universal Declaration of 1948 the United Nations proclaimed that elementary education shall be free and compulsory and be made available for everyone. Still, there are more than 110 million children world wide who don't go to school - two-thirds of them are girls.

Educational gender imbalance is endemic for many African countries. Over the last 15 years the state of Ghana has made many efforts to cope with this problem and has committed itself to various programs aiming at encouraging girls to go to school. But even now some consider girls' education a lost investment.

Esi Parry from Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and Peter Koppen from Deutsche Welle, the German International Radio and TV Station, have visited schools throughout Ghana to find out the situation on girl child education.

Take Song „Get your girl child to school“

Fx schoolchildren in class

Breaktime at a Primary and Junior Secondary School in the District of Greater Accra. Students buzz around, playing football, chatting or just enjoying some moments of rest. At first sight, boys do not outnumber girls. So have things improved ?

Insert Lucy Kwapong, Tema municipal director of education

„In our African family set-up, if it's a matter of choice of educating two children, one being a boy and the other a girl, the automatic choice is that of a boy. And very often the girl is pushed to the background, to help in the house or to trade while the boy is being educated.“

Naana Amuah, a school-supervisor believes things have changed.

Insert Naana Amuah

„We are putting measures in place to encourage girls in all aspects to be in school, try to study and be a par with the boys. So we are doing a lot more this time concentrating on the girls and encouraging them. It's yielding: All of us will have to do their part, the parents, we the teachers will have to encourage the children as much as possible so that together the girl child can also come up.“

But with the exception of the Greater Accra region none of the other regions has attained parity. So isn't it ironic that in the 21st century Ghana should still be talking about the importance of educating women when Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey, an eminent son of the country made this most famous statement in the 1880s ?

Take girl (echo)

„If you educate a boy, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation.“

Insert Lucy Kwapong

„Beliefs and customs die hard. So much as Dr. Aggrey made his famous statement, progression is quite slow. But I must also say it is much more encouraging. We may reach there at the target of having all girls at school. But it's a slow progression – slow but sure.“

Insert Lea Ametame, director of education in Dangbe district

„Education hasn't gone that far. I think the concentration was in the urban areas. If anything at all, we should have started from the rural deprived areas, but we rather started from the urban areas. So it is now that we've come to the realisation that a lot more has to be done in the rural areas.“

Over the years successive governments have tried to improve the quality of education. But it was not until 1995 that emphasis was put on the girl child. One of the milestones in Ghana's political efforts was the Accra Accord on Girls' Education, advocating a policy and special program to eliminate the gender gap in schools. To this end, Girls' Education Units GEU were established in 1997 with three main objectives.

Insert Juliana Osei, GEU Headquarter in Accra

„That is to ensure equity in enrolments and then to reduce dropout rates for girls. And then to ensure that girls transit from primary school to J.S.S. and then to S.S.S.. That as many girls who enter school will continue to higher levels. Then we wanted to make sure that many more girls than before were opting für science and mathematics when they climb higher the educational ladder.“

Take Song „Send her to school, engineers we need...“

The Girls' Education Officers were to ensure that girls who had been lagging behind boys in the educational indicators attain the aim set by the government's FCUBE, that is free compulsory basic education to all school-aged children by the year 2005. One of the GEO's:

Insert Cecilia Edu

„In our communities we realise that girls are being overburdened. They are asked to do most chores at the house while boys play. So we have been educating or sensitising our parents to make sure they share the responsibilities between boys and girls equally.“

Ghana's population is very young, with females forming over 50%. The main target of a GEO is to encourage parents to send their girl child to school. So what do parents say ?

Insert voxpop parents

„Our population in Ghana, more than 50% are women. So if they don't go to school, half of the population is left back, and that will affect our nation greatly.“ – „We have to do more, because so many girls and ladies are on the streets.“ – „There is no difference between a girl and a boy. The only difference is the sexual part and therefore we should put them on the same platform.“ – „Time has past when we kept our girls in the kitchen, doing the household chores and other things. Now we are seeing that they are doing even better than some of the boys.“ – „Some don't know the importance of education. They should involve some of the parents, they should invite them to go and see what the girls can do.“ - „So, if you keep the girl in the home, you are wasting her time, you are wasting your own money, and you are doing no good to the society.“

Fx school-bell

On our way out we drive past a huge yellow sign-board leading to the J.S.S. „Progress lies in hard work“ it says. But do girls and boys have the same opportunities ?

Insert J.S.S. boys & girls

„Sometimes when we come from school, our parents, especially our mothers won't allow us to learn. She always wants us to do the household chores so we don't get time to study.“ - „Some of the pupils in class discourage the girls from learning science and maths and going for it, because we normally tease them and make fun of them and bring down their spirit of learning“ - „I think the attention should be on the girls because they are those who lack the

confidence to pursue the subject. The boys think they already know, they do not need any help. They are the ones to compete with us, so we need the attention most“ - „Girls should be given the chance of education, because since Ghana gained its independence, men have been ruling this country and I think that girls should be given the chance of education so that we can see how they can manage the progress of the country.“ - „The girls are often harassed by the male teachers sexually. Most girls, if they are not promoted, they will try to stop schooling and this really affects them, because they want to go on further with their education.“ - „I think it's the fault of the parents, because they push their girls into early marriage. Because there are parents who like money too much. So if they learn that a man has a lot of money, they then force her daughter to go and marry this man, just for the sake to get money. So I think it's for the fault of the parents.“

Insert mining trucks

Obuasi is the home of Ghana's pot of gold. The gold-mines employ about 20.000 people, the gold-quota per ton is 30 grams and more, making the Obuasi gold-mines one of the most high-yielding in the world. Despite this, Obuasi also has its share of the problem affecting education – at the town's education office some major issues are raised, including Galamsey which is illegal mining.

Insert Education Officers

„There are many reasons for girls not being in school in this district. One of them is the large family size of the miners. Because they have lots of children, they cannot afford in the most cases to send their girls to school. They will rather prefer to send their boys to school because the boys will come back, work in the mines and so help the family grow.“ – „We have had dropouts, especially with the boys, those who went on Galamsey, because they viewed mining as the end-product of everything. They also realised that with the Galamsey they got richer than the teachers who were teaching them“ - „Girls do the selling, yes. It's lucrative to sell because incomes are high, it's easy to sell some big money, so that's why girls are leaving the schools.“

Fx market-place

In 1987, only one out of 11 children at Secondary School in Ghana was a girl. A figure that encouraged the country's government to inaugurate a program specifically designed to push girls forward. That was the birth of the Science, Technology and Maths Education Clinics, a new kind of summer school for girls. Now, the ratio of girls to boys taking science and maths is down to a level of about one to three. A STME-Coordinator.

Insert Mohamad Jeduah

„Well, it hasn't been very rosy, but things are getting better. With the introduction of the STME we have noticed by graph that there has been an improvement in the attendance of girls to science-classes, to senior classes. Previously, it was hardly happening at all, but now there is a certain improvement.“

At the beginning in 1986, about 200 girls benefited from the STME-clinics. Today, more than 10.000 girls and boys all over the country are invited to these summer camps at the district level. Two science-students at SSS-level are Rita 17, and Dubalin 18 years.

Insert Rita

„ I believe that girls don't want to do maths or science-related subjects is a stereotype. Because boys are equally scared of those subjects. It's just that the number of boys that are in school are more than girls. And those subjects are considered difficult. So if you enter a class like that and have a subject that is difficult, you realise that there are more boys than girls. Not because girls are scared of that particular subject but because there are fewer of them than compared with boys. So I don't believe that girls are scared of maths or science.“

Insert Dubalin

„I don't think girls should be afraid of science, because every girl, if you are interested in a subject, you can really do it. You don't have to listen to what the people say, that science is so difficult because I don't see science so difficult at all. No matter who you are, you can do it, if only you are determined.“

Girls' desire to pursue science and maths was thwarted by the old teaching methods. So now teachers are being encouraged to demystify the teaching and learning of these subjects.

Fx teacher performing

Barriers to girls' education are myriad and interrelated. A district director of education gives an insight into the multifaceted problems.

Insert Comfort Regina Ametame

„Many girls drop out for various reasons. I think that first and for most it's due to poverty. Somewhere along the line when things become difficult, they are forced to drop out of school. Some drop out because you don't see a lot of role models for them to emulate. Dropout rate is also from teenage pregnancy as a result of which they are forced to leave school. You know, most boys after school virtually do nothing at home. But in our society, it's the girls who do all the household chores. In the typical Ghanaian society it is believed that no matter what, the girls' place is in the kitchen. So most people think, it is not worth educating girls to such high levels.“

Barriers affect boys also, but they affect girls even more. So the goal of gender parity at all levels from pre-school through university is still a long way. One option would be to reduce or eliminate fees. Since poverty is one of the major reasons cited for not sending girls to school, decreasing costs für education would have a positive impact on all enrolments. Female scholarships and other forms of support such as feeding programs are a solution to higher enrolment rates. However, there are increaisng concerns that focusing on enrolment rates isn't enough if girls aren't able to keep up. Mere physical presence in school does not help if girls do all the household chores and get tired before coming to school

Fx ducks and crickets

Tamale is in the Northern Region of Ghana. Due to the harsh climatic condition life is not as easy and comfortable as it is in the south. The creeping of the Sahara makes the soil arid and less productive compared to the rich rainforest-belt about 300 km away. Isaac Bonzale, a district director of education.

Insert Isaac Alpha Bonzale

„The land over so many years has been overused, has lost its fertility. So for that matter, when they grow their crops at the end of the season, the yields are very poor. And they are unable to sustain their family until the next season. The other thing is the traditional method of farming which is still practised in this area. Most people find it very difficult to come to money to purchase fertiliser to fertilise the soil. So, they still engage in the traditional method which is not helping them in any way.“

As parents often lack financial resources, they aren't able to send all their children to school. Allhaji Ibrahima, an Assistent School Director.

Insert Allhaji Ibrahima

„There is no parent who doesn't see the benefit of sending their children to school. All parents do see it. But parents in one way or the other, are forced to withdraw their children from school. If I am a poor mother and I have to sell some ice-water to raise some 5000

Cedis for me to be able to buy the maize and to cook for the evening, I can tell Mariama, please take these things and sell them at the market and don't go to school, because if you go, we shall sleep hungry. So these are some of the issues that force parents to deprive their children of going to school."

Although Ghana has made free and compulsory education a responsibility of the government by enshrining this article in the constitution, school is not entirely free. School-uniforms, school-bags have to be provided and examination fees paid. Expenditures some parents can't afford. But could it also be a question of misplaced priorities ?

Insert Cecilia Edu, GEO Mallam

"If they tell us they don't have money, we have what we call the income and expenditure pile-chart. That we use to let the parents know where their priorities lie. Most of the time they use their money on funerals, the men use their money womanizing or drinking, women also spend their money on expensive clothings to the detriment of their children. And when this is realised, they say, "Aah". So we are not putting in enough for education. It is not because we are poor."

That most schools are not girl-friendly is another factor that continues to discriminate against girls in school.

Insert Isaac Alpha Bonzale

"You go to school and you don't have toilet facilities separately for boys and girls. Both will have to use the same facility. You know, by nature women or should I say girls are shy. They would not like to use the same facility like boys. And girls are interested in beautiful things like flowers and so on. Nowadays you go to school and flowers are not there."

And maybe because of overcrowding girls feel uncomfortable in school, too. The number of students in a class goes up to 90. A headteacher:

Insert Abdel Asis Suleymana, Tolon headteacher

"The furniture is not enough, because when you go to a class you will see three of them sitting in a dual-desk, sometimes even four. So they are not feeling comfortable. So learning is very hard for them."

Take school anthem

Especially in the northern rural areas, NGO's have been supporting governmental efforts on girl child education. They provide school-uniforms and food. Because the north is sparsely populated, children have to walk up to five kilometres to get to their Junior Secondary School. So the non-governmental organisations also provide bicycles for such girls.

Fx ocean-waves & sea-gulls

A fishing community in the south-east of Ghana. Though a peri-urban town, Ada's mainstay in canoe-fishing. As there is not enough economic activity, people have little or no source of income and that poses some challenges.

Insert voxpop parents

"Some are in abject poverty and they need to be helped to send their girls to school. Because most of them, when they come to school, you see that they don't even have been given pocket-money. You see them, you have sympathy for them and you give them money. Even exercise books to write in are a problem, school-uniforms and other things are problems of the parents."- "I think it's financial problems. Most of the rural parents don't have any work, so most of the time, when the fathers don't have enough money to cater for them,

then the mothers are at a loss. So that makes the children go around looking for money from the men. And that brings along teenage pregnancy.“

Take song „ Send your girl-child to school“

Insert J.S.S. girls & boys

„I think girls should be educated, because when they grow up, and they become career-women, they won't leave their children illiterate. And they should be on the same level with men.“ – „Girls are the future of Mother Ghana. Without girls, Mother Ghana cannot grow.“ – „It's good for girls to go to school, because it helps them to be a good mother.“ – „What men can do, women can do. And what girls can do, men can do. When boys are supposed to go to school, girls must also do.“

Much as girls and boys have to be in school, the problem of quality teaching and learning has not altogether been solved. Getting teachers to accept to serve in deprived areas is not easy. Some teachers refuse posting there because there is no electricity, potable water or suitable accommodation. Leslie Casley-Hayford, a development consultant.

Insert Leslie Casley-Hayford, Associates for Change (AFC)

„We haven't got teachers that sacrifice anymore. We have teachers – and I don't blame them – many of them wanting to escape the system of poverty. They have gone through it, they have gone to university, some of them have come from very difficult backgrounds. They don't want to be faced with poverty again. So you don't find many of them being able to fit back into the cultural context, into the socio-economic context in which they have to be put. This society, like Nkrumah said in the early days, the society in Ghana is built on the teacher. It's the pillar of every nation, it's the pillar of every education system. And unfortunately we are just having very weak pillars right now.“

Fx nightlife

Tema – a flourishing port-city and Ghana's gateway. But even here, life isn't that rosy for all. Many girls are found on the street either selling or working as porters and in some cases as prostitutes. Lucy Kwapong, the municipal director of education.

Insert Lucy Kwapong

„Quite often there are a lot of girls that are been brought from up the country to serve as house-helpers. And you know, Tema is a commercial city. So many girls are brought just like in Accra, they are brought down to engage in trading and other activities. Definitely, you can't have all the girls in school.“

Fx nightlife

The efforts made to get more girls into school have had an impact on primary level. But it's just the tip of the iceberg – much more needs to be done.

Insert Lucy Kwapong

„Here in Ghana the problem is: In the primaries, girls are in school, they get to JSS, they start dropping out, and by the time they are getting to university, the number has reduced drastically. It's like a bottle-neck. So we need to not only talk about children being enrolled at school in the primary level but we should work on the retention rate at all levels.“

Fx classroom

Data indicate that the gender gap persists as pupils progress from Primary to JSS where the percentage of boy-girl ratio was 55% to 45%. Gap widens at each successive level, with females making up only 33% of the SSS population and 25% at the tertiary level.

Even though Ghana is among the 88 countries which probably won't achieve the Education-For-All equity goals by 2005, it won't be for lack of trying. All sectors, governmental and non-governmental have put their shoulders to the wheel. But how have they fared ?

Insert Leslie Casley-Hayford, AFC

„When you look at the reasons why girls' education has not really made the impacts that it has, part of it has to do with the fact that we are not working together. Most of us are doing very isolated activities and the connection that makes the holistic programs come together, those programs are not working together. You got scholarships being done by one NGO, you got teacher empowerment being done by another organisation, the government is building schools. The plans we sometimes have are so overwhelming, so it's really important that we focus more on civil society actors, see how these actors can come within a government framework and help government implement these wonderful plans for girls' education.“

Fx Song „Send your girl child to school“

Credits